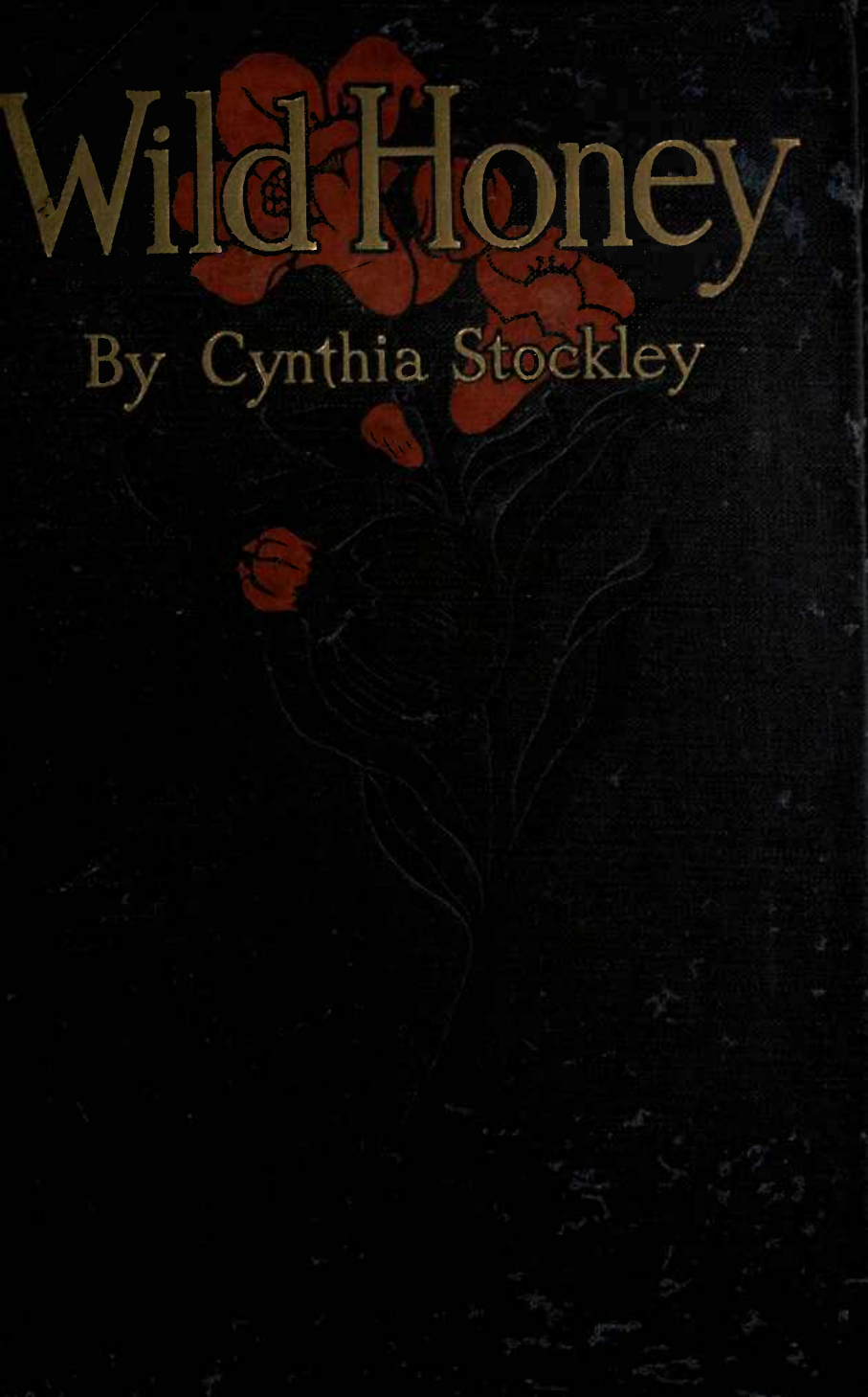
Wild Honey

By Cynthia Stockley



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By Cynthia Stockley

Poppy
The Story of a South African Girl

The Claw
A Story of South Africa

Wanderfoot

Wild Honey

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"I CANNOT OFFER GENTLE FLOWERS,
ONLY THESE STRANGE AND FATEFUL BLOOMS."

Beatrice Irwin.

Drawn by A. Glossep.

WILD HONEY

STORIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

CYNTHIA STOCKLEY

AUTHOR OF "POPPY," "THE CLAW," "WANDERFOOT," ETC.

AFRICA

O! Come where stephanotis grows,
And the pomegranate breaks blood-red.
Come where the cruel cactus blows
And pungent aloes are outspread.

I cannot offer gentle flowers,
Only these strange and fateful blooms.
My love is not for passing hours,
But for Eternity and Tombs.

Beatrice Irwin.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1914

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by
CYNTHIA STOCKLEY

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To

J. Y. F. C.

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Wild Honey

Wild Honey

PART I

IT was a six-mule mail-coach that bumped and banged along the rough highroad to Buluwayo, and Vivienne Carlton anathematised the fate that condemned her to travel by it. Cordially she detested the cheerful garrulity of certain of her fellow-passengers, quoting to herself Louis Vance's satirical *mot:* "A pessimist is a person who has to live with optimists." Gladly would she have slain the optimists with whom she was so tightly packed in the hooded body of the cart—for the term "coach" was merely a polite fiction: the affair was neither more nor less than a two-seated Cape cart, with the hood thrown back so that the mules might find the pulling easier and the passengers be more effectively grilled.

Two passengers shared the front seat with the driver. Miss Carlton was wedged in the back seat between a perspiring Cape Colonial and a tall lithe man with a deeply tanned complexion and

careless light grey eyes, who was as taciturn as herself. No one looking at her sitting there so composedly, closely veiled and gloved, violet eyes quietly fixed on the horizon, her tall khaki-clad figure preserving in spite of its contiguity with strangers an air of dainty aloofness, would have guessed her frame of mind. Her companions had her marked down as an English girl whose beauty and breeding warranted her to put on as much "side" as she liked, and in this they were not very far from the truth. They were also certain that she was the daughter of a lord, and wondered how she came to be travelling alone. The Colonial and the man who came from Kimberley admired her madly without daring to address a word to her; the showy blonde who was going up to be a barmaid in Salisbury, would have given the necklace of diamonds she wore for its safety under her cotton blouse, to possess that aloof manner and gift of remaining silent without being offensive. Only the third man with his careless glance that took in every point of the changing scene of bush, and tree, and kop, had any notion of what was going on behind the composed lovely face of the girl next to him. And the reason he knew was that though he looked like a pirate or a Klondike miner, or anything that was reckless and

disreputable he was really of the same world as herself, and could very well guess how the discomfort and hateful intimacy of coach-travelling outraged her. But even he was far from guessing at the hopeless fury, and bitter disdain of her surroundings and the world in general that was rankling in the heart so close to him that he could almost feel its beating.

Vivienne Carlton's hand was against all men as she believed all women's to be against her; but she had learned to conceal the fact well. Not by brandishing her scorn and detestation of it could she hope to get back her own from a world that had treated her badly. Two years of struggling for a living in the ranks of journalism had taught her nothing if it had not taught her this!

Ah! what a two years! Instead of enjoying the brilliant peace of the land about her, she was thinking of them now, turning her eyes inward to memories that were poisoning her life. Two years of outward kow-towing to those who had once kow-towed to her, of being cut and ignored by people who when she was heiress to great estates and an ancient name would have petted and fawned upon her, had not the natural haughtiness of her nature rebuffed them. They remembered those rebuffs when the tide of her family's pro-

sperity turned, and the great law case that had dragged on wearily for many months came to an end with the verdict that disinherited her father and gave to an Australian cad all that Vivienne had been taught from her birth to consider irrefragably hers. Well had her haughtiness been remembered against her in that hour! It seemed as though all fashionable society had been poised expectant, stones and javelins in hand, waiting for the fall of the house of Giffard-Carlton. Sir Gerald, her gentle, chivalrous father, had not long survived the loss of his title and position, but Vivienne and her mother of the same spirit, proud and defiant in adversity, bore the brunt of society's malignant glee with unbowed heads, contemptuously refusing the charity of the usurper, and the humiliating favours of so-called friends. They were obliged to step down from their high places, but they did it with dignity, and might with dignity have retired into obscurity and been forgotten by society, like many another before them, but for the fact that of all her gifts the only one Vivienne could turn to account was the gift of description and charming phrase which soon gave her a place and a living in the world of journalism. And in that connection she came into constant touch with the world of society. For she

had been obliged of course to begin at the very beginning, penny-a-lining reports of balls and receptions, descriptions of weddings and the gowns of débutantes. It was at such work that so much that was wounding and embittering had come her way. Many a cruel insult had she been obliged to swallow for her guinea a column. Many an old score cherished by *les nouveaux riches* against the house of Giffard-Carlton had been paid into the account of the lady journalist! And the result of it all was a nature incalculably embittered and corroded. Though she was only twenty-two, Vivienne did not feel like a girl any longer, but she still looked like a girl, and a very charming one at that. The fact was one she meant to use as a weapon in her reprisals against a world that had mishandled her. Her gift of writing was a weapon that enabled her to beat a living for herself and her mother out of life, but her beauty was a far more potent one, and she meant to use it to the hilt as a means of getting back her own from society. This work she had come out to Africa to do for the *Daily Flag*—a series of articles descriptive of the life, inhabitants, and prospects of Cecil Rhodes's country—would, she hoped, prove to be a means to a very special end. If her articles made a big hit she would not have to go back to

describing ball gowns. But she did not mean to return to journalism at all if she could help it. There were plenty of millionaires in Africa—and she had plenty to give in exchange for the millions of one of them—youth, beauty, birth, breeding, an intimate knowledge of the social world! There was only one thing he must not ask of her, and that was a heart. She might be tempted to reveal to him what she carried instead—a husk with a little brown dust in it, like a rotten nut! To cry to him as Baudelaire cried in his bitterness:

"My heart?—the beasts have eaten it!"

She had little fear of being unable to gain her end. Many men had proposed to her since she became simple Miss Carlton, but none of them had been able to offer enough in exchange for the rotten nut. The man destined to receive that precious gift must be very rich indeed, must have enough to buy back what the world had robbed her of—place, and power to put her foot on the necks of those who had humiliated her. There were many such in Africa. Even during her short stay in Cape Town, she had met one who showed himself as heartily disposed as he was well-equipped to shoulder his side of the bargain. Only for a foolish and incomprehensible shrinking

on her part at the last moment, she would now have been engaged to marry Wolfe Montague, one of Johannesberg's great financial kings.

However! She was to see him again in a month or two in Rhodesia and doubtless by that time she would be rid of all foolish prejudices. This charming coach journey was one of the things that would help her to come to a propitious decision! At the thought, she gave a little cynical laugh that made her companions stare, wondering what she found in the scenery to amuse her.

Indeed, nothing less amusing than this journey could be imagined. Day after day of weary crawling across a landscape that changed unceasingly in outline, though never in detail. Always the undulating grassy slopes dotted with bush, the eternal kopje ahead, and the eternal kopje left behind. There was something terrible about the brooding loneliness, the eloquent stillness, the great unending sameness of it all.

They had been travelling for four nights and days and must continue for a good many more yet before the end was reached—sometimes putting up for a night at a rough wayside hotel, more often just outspanning beside a mule stable during the darkest hours and sleeping as best they could in the cramped cart, with rugs and mail-bags as a

common couch. Vivienne had never imagined such physical discomfort possible, and though her body was too strong to suffer by it, her mind was sick, and her whole being revolted at the sordidness of it all. Sleeping side by side with strange men, and a common woman, wedged against them, listening to their snores! Wakening in the morning to the intimacy of their unkempt faces! Eating and drinking in their company, listening to their eternal talk!

Thank Heaven! to-night at least was to be spent at a hotel. Even the others who were seasoned coach-travellers congratulated themselves on that fact, not so much because there would be beds to sleep in, as because an obvious storm was brewing. The sunlight had gone suddenly, and black clouds, lined with pallid green, were grouping in the west, taking the form of a great monster with brooding wings. Now and then a quiver of lightning passed across the sky, and a large drop of rain splashed down into the coach.

On rounding a kopje, they came suddenly upon Palapye, the native village where the night was to be spent. It was the kraal of Khama, king of the Bechuana tribe—hundreds of straw thatched huts sprawling up a hill and across the plain!

Vivienne, since she left Pretoria, had seen many such "hotels" as the one by which the coach now drew up: a square wattle-and-daub affair with a number of smaller huts scattered around it. Painfully she clambered down, and with the others followed the worn woman who kept the place to one of these small huts which were the guest rooms. For once there were enough to go round, and no one was obliged to share. That was something to be thankful for in an odious world!

After she had washed some of the dust from her face and hands and removed a great deal more from her dark curly hair, which she wore boy-fashion—short, and parted on one side—Vivienne went and sat by her hut door to get a little air. The storm had not yet broken, and with the thermometer at anything over a hundred, the heat was almost unbearable. Immediately, she became aware of another woman, sitting in the doorway of a hut opposite—a stone-still woman, whose face, shadowed by a dark print sunbonnet was pallid as a bone, with sunken eyes staring absorbedly before her into nothingness. In the listless hands hanging over her knees, she held a child's little torn shabby straw hat.

After one glance, Vivienne in spite of the heat

felt a shiver creep over her, and presently in the silence, knowledge came to her that she was in the presence of tragedy. Something terrible was going on behind those fixed, absorbed eyes, some sorrow too deep for words was brooding with bowed head in the mind of that silent watcher. The girl felt the heart quiver in her breast—that heart she supposed the beasts had eaten! And she longed to put out a hand or speak a word of comfort to the woman. But she had lost the habit of saying sympathetic things and it is one that cannot be regained in a moment. The best she could do was to quietly withdraw from the presence of grief, and stay in the back of her hut until the hotel-woman came to call her for dinner.

In the square hut, the other passengers were gathered round the usual meal: goat chops, potatoes, a steaming dish of green mealies boiled on the cob. Vivienne took her place with her habitual aloof composure, paying little attention to the general conversation until a question addressed by the barmaid to the hotel-keeper roused her interest.

"In the name of goodness, what's wrong with that woman I saw sitting inside one of the huts?"

The hotel-keeper made a hopeless gesture with her shoulders.

"*Ach!* Don't ask me, it's too awful! Her *kindt* is lost in the bush."

"My God!" said the Kimberley man abruptly, and his mealie cob fell into his plate.

"Yes," continued the woman. "Only three and a half years old, and one minute playing round the waggon in the sight of her pa and ma, and the next minute . . . *gone!* That was four days ago, and they never seen her since." She added in a low voice, "Nor never will!"

"But what happened?" stammered Vivienne startled out of her reserve.

"Goodness knows, Miss. . . . She just wandered out of sight behind a bush, I suppose, and then—all bushes look alike! You can get lost in three minutes on the veld. Just think of that *arme kind* tumbling along, falling, and sobbing, and wondering why her ma didn't come. And they hunting like mad things for her! The father's gone cracked as a Hottentot, and still goes on hunting; but *she* can't stand on her feet any more, and they brought her in here to-day for me to mind."

Vivienne thought it the most appalling thing she had ever heard. Her soul was sick within her. She could eat nothing. She would have left the hut, but the storm had broken with a roar and

a flash, and outside the rain was swishing down. She was obliged to sit still and hear more of this story which paralysed her with terror and pity. A love of little children is a very inconvenient possession for a woman who means to beat the world at its own heartless game!

"They found the kid's hat next day, more than twenty miles from where they lost her. Think of it! A child of that age wandering twenty miles!"

"She ran of course," said the light-eyed man briefly. "They always run."

"Or perhaps . . . you never know . . . a lion——"

"Oh, *don't!*" Vivienne cried out suddenly, and put her hand over her eyes. The others stared at her moodily, and the subject dropped. But presently the Kimberley man asked the Colonial if he had ever heard of the fellow who was lost from the Pioneer Column?

"Ya!" said the Colonial. "Seen him often in Buluwayo. He's got a queer look in his eye and I don't wonder. Forty days before he found the Column again—long after they had given him up. And he could never tell a thing he did in those forty days."

"They never can. A fellow I knew in the

B.B.P. got lost out from Tuli one time. And when they found him again, all his front teeth were gone. He couldn't remember how it happened. But of course it was lying on the ground gnawing roots did it."

The barmaid leaned on her elbows, eagerly interested; but Vivienne, white-lipped, listened because she must.

"The great thing is not to lose your head," said the Kimberley man, pleasantly conversational. "I've known lots of fellows who've been lost, and they all agree that the first instinct when you realise you're lost is to start running. Just run and run till you drop. Then the madness gets you, and you begin to tear off your clothes and pitch them in every direction as you run. Nearly every fellow ever found after being lost is stark naked—begging your pardon, Miss," he added as his eye fell upon Vivienne. She took no notice. The rain had stopped, and she fled before she should hear more horrors.

But that night she could not sleep for thinking of the lost little child, and its desolate mother. The storm commenced again, and raged round the hut. Lightning streaked through the canvas windows and rain lashed the earth. She was still wide-eyed on a tear-wet pillow when the hotel-

keeper banged the door to say that the coach would start in twenty minutes.

The first thing she noticed as they clambered to their places was that the light-eyed man was missing. She was far too distant to make any remark, but the others with a kind of road-fellowship that surprised her refused to let the coach start until some explanation was forthcoming. The driver, a ferocious looking half-caste, scowled at them.

"*Ach!* He's gone off on some business of his own if you want to know . . . and coming on by de next coach. *Now* will you stop wasting de Company's time and let me drive my mules?"

So on they went through the fresh dawn. The rain-washed land gave up a delicious perfume of drenched leaves and growing things, and a scent of mimosa blew like a caress against the cheeks of the weary travellers. The sky was a bride in shroudy veils of pale pink that warmed to rose, until the great spiked sun shot up from behind the horizon, and took her in a glittering embrace. Then brazen day was on them once more.

They slept in the coach that night, and got little ease of it. All were thankful enough when next mid-day found them outspanned for an hour or two beside a mule stable. The driver made a

fire, and the passengers unpacked their baskets. Vivienne was sick to death of tinned food, but glad to accept a cup of tea made in the kettle. Afterwards she strolled away to an open pool not far off, while the others snatched the chance of an hour's sleep in the shadow of the stable.

The little pool or "pan" of water lay glittering in the sunshine and she sat beside it under a tree shaped like a candelabra with great scarlet and yellow flowers rising in flames from its branches. She was too careful of her complexion to attempt to wash in such torrid heat, but she did not mind her hands getting slightly sunburnt for the pleasure of laving them in the tepid water. Presently a charming little creature of the squirrel tribe came out of a bush and looked at her with bright eyes. She took a pellet of chocolate from inside her camera case and held it out invitingly, but the tiny creature backed a little, then sat up on its hind legs and cocked its head at her. She took out her camera and tried to snap it, but it ran again just at the critical moment. The same thing happened two or three times, until she got a good picture. Then she tried once more to beguile it with the chocolate. But whenever she got close, it bounded away. At last, she gave up, and was suddenly astonished to find how far she had come

from her pool. Glittering there through the trees it appeared to be quite a quarter of a mile away. Yet that seemed scarcely possible.

"How silly of me!" she murmured. "This is just the way people get lost I expect," and at the thought she noticed a distinct inclination in her feet to hurry, but did not permit them any such foolishness.

"Don't be silly," she repeated to herself. "What are you afraid of? There is the pool straight in front of you, and as soon as you reach it you will see the coach."

So she forced herself to walk calmly, and all the time she marvelled at the distance she had come just in those few little short runs after the squirrel. And when she got to the pool there was no sign of the coach!

"This is too fantastic!" she exclaimed, and laughed aloud. But her laugh had such a strange sound that she thought it was some one else's and turned round violently to see who was there. Then she drew nearer the pool, and saw that the tree growing by it was a smaller one than the one she had sat under, and had fewer flowers. At last she realised it was a different pool. But there was no other in sight! Her heart came up into her throat.

"I must go back the way I came," she told herself steadily. "When I get to where I first saw this pool I shall not be far off the original one. It was probably behind my back all the time, and if I had turned round I should have seen it!"

So with her nerves well in hand she began to walk back the way she had come. She could not keep quite straight, on account of the trees dotted about everywhere, each the exact image of the other, and she kept turning round because for some reason she could not bear to lose sight of one pool before she regained the other. Suddenly far off she spied the gleam of water through trees, and at once she frankly hurried, telling herself she had been away long enough from the coach and that the driver would be waiting to start. Her last few steps were very swift. She was breathing quite heavily when she reached the pool and glanced round keenly for the coach. It was gone! What was more the stable was gone too! She gave a wild cry. Her knees weakened under her and she found herself sitting down.

Presently regaining her courage she got up and looked about her critically. It was then she saw that there was no candelabra tree by this pool. That shook her a little.

"Better call out," was her next thought, and she

followed it up by a shout that sounded absurdly like a baby crying from a pin-prick. She was reminded of the little lost child, and began to tremble in spite of herself. "I'll get out into the open," she thought. "There are too many trees here. They shut in my voice."

She moved a little way off and called. Then again she walked on and called. Mechanically she found herself moving along, calling as she went. Her voice seemed to grow weaker every moment, but her steps grew quicker. At last, she began to run.

Something tickled her face, and lazily, for she was very tired, and there was a rushing noise in her ears, she put up her hand to brush the irritation away. Then her hand tickled too. She held it before her eyes and saw that it was covered with little black ants. At that, her aversion to creeping things galvanised her into movement, and she sprang up, frantically brushing scores of ants from her face and hands. It was then she realised that she had been lying face downwards on the ground. She must have fallen, and lain where she fell. How long ago that was she had no idea, but the sun was very low. She could see it in the reddened skies just behind some trees.

The next discovery she made was a still stranger

one. When she set out on her journey she had been dressed in a suit of khaki-coloured duck, made in three pieces; a Norfolk coat, a short deer-stalker skirt that could be unhooked and taken off like a modern riding-habit, and, underneath, a serviceable pair of riding-breeches of the same material. These were met at the knees by leather gaiters. Stout brown shoes, and a dark silk shirt completed the suit, the whole having been designed and beautifully made by a well-known man in Bond Street; for with her mental eyes fixed on millionaires, Miss Carlton had not thought it wise to be economical in the direction of clothes. She now discovered herself to be attired only in the silk shirt and riding-breeches. Her boots and gaiters were scratched and worn almost beyond recognition; her hat, coat, skirt, and camera were gone. She had absolutely no idea how she had lost them, but some faint notion of searching for them made her look in the direction of the sun to see how long it would be before she was left in the dark. Then she observed another amazing thing. Instead of disappearing the sun had actually risen above the trees, and was advancing into the sky. The world was full of surprises. It was morning!

She had spent a night alone on the veld then! It seemed strange that she could remember nothing

about this, but somehow the fact did not worry her very much. She felt indeed extraordinarily calm and careless. A sense of lightness and freedom pervaded her. She would not have minded anything if only she had not been so horribly tired. Also hungry and thirsty.

She began to saunter forward in a casual sort of way, and presently noticed that the rushing sound grew louder, and was not in her head at all, but in the air. There was a river close at hand, and she was making straight for it! This pleased her greatly, and when she came in sight of it she laughed joyously. It was fringed with trees, thick and tall, and the banks were high, but she had no difficulty in clambering down into the river-bed which was wide as Piccadilly Circus, and mostly composed of pure white sand and flat rocks. The stream in the middle which made so much noise was comparatively shallow and she could easily have forded it. What she did, however, was to lie down flat beside it and drink long and deep. At the same time, she experienced the sensation of having performed this act before.

"But one always has that feeling every time one does anything new!" she thought. Her face reflected in the water looked very dark, and her hands were burnt almost black—covered with

scratches too. That did not trouble her much. Her eye was ranging round the trees for something to eat. In a minute, she spied something yellow that might be fruit. While she was climbing up amongst the rough branches and foliage, adding considerably to her stock of scratches, she again had the sensation of having done this thing before. They were only sour plums, and she didn't care much for sour things, but the peel was not bad. Later she found some wild apricots. There were also little flower bulbs sticking above the ground, with rushes attached to them, and of these she pulled a number. Some that had an oniony flavour she discarded, but others tasted as she knew they would, just like nuts. Munching placidly, she wandered on her way. The rushing sound of the river was pleasant company.

As she sauntered along, her glance struck something on the ground that was certainly foreign to the surroundings—nothing less than the remains of a large canvas sack. Having slept for many nights upon mail-bags, she was in a position to recognise one when she saw it, besides, round this one were scattered the remains of many letters, torn, ant-eaten, and rotted by rain. Musingly, she lifted up the tattered canvas and examined it. There were sharp teeth marks on it, and it had been ripped savagely

open from end to end. Yet, coyly hiding in a tarry fold, there remained some residue of what had evidently once been a full bag of mail—on Her Majesty's Service—a stamped and addressed letter, and a newspaper. The ants had chewed both a little, but the canvas had kept them in good condition. Vivienne examined them with interest, and it being at this time full noon, the pleasant idea occurred to her of having a little rest, and a little read. Accordingly she seated herself and opened the newspaper.

It was the Buluwayo *Chronicle* dated October the 21st (the date she had landed in Cape Town) and addressed to a lady in Devonshire who would never now receive it. The contents did not interest Vivienne. The local news of a town she had never seen would scarcely be likely to do so. She threw it aside and took up the letter. For a moment she looked at the blurred address:

GEORGE BRAIN, ESQR.,
MINING HOTEL,
BEACONSFIELD,
DIAMOND FIELDS. (BARKLY WEST.)

Then as if it were the most natural thing in the world to open other people's letters, she slipped her fingers under the flap of the envelope, pulled

it off and threw it away. Unfolding the letter, she read it from beginning to end.

"ONDER-KOPPIES" NEAR BULUWAYO.
Oct. 20th, 19—

Dear George,

As soon as you get this, raise £500 on the nail, and wire it up. I know money is tight, but get that pony from somewhere and your pile is made. Hunt and I have struck it rich. As a farming partner Hunt is no more good than a dead dog, but he knows the surveying and mineralogy business like his A. B. C. On the Rand, they used to call him the fellow with a nose for reef, and only he's lazy as the devil he'd be rich as Hades by now. Anyway prowling round here he has nosed out a plum . . . *the land adjoining ours is lousy with gold.* Unfortunately the whole 6000 acres belong to de Windt—you know—the hunter and explorer fellow, who got this farm for his share in the Matabeleland row. However he's never done anything with it except stick up a hut, and it's common knowledge here that he'll take what he can get for his land, for since the railway is on its way he professes himself sick of this country and is going to make tracks further north. He's got no money, never has, and will jump at £500 ready

cash, so hustle and raise it George, and we'll keep the loot in the family. Hunt and I haven't a rap between us, and no means of getting any except by selling our land, which would look fishy to de Windt who is no fool. You can trust me there's no mistake. Hunt is too wise a bird for that. But if you've any doubts, come up yourself and bring the best surveyor on the Fields. You'll find that everything is O. K. Only it must be done sharp,—for de Windt will be up here on his way North about end November. Get busy. *Zachabona !*

BROTHER FRANK.

"Charming fellow, brother Frank!" said Miss Carlton thoughtfully, and having no pocket, thrust the letter into the front of her silk shirt. Afterwards she sat shuffling the rags of paper and canvas with the toe of her shoe, wondering how they had come to this place. The conclusion was that the bag must have been dropped from the down-country coach, though clearly not at this spot, for there was no road. Probably some hungry animal had carried it off and torn it open to see what it contained. Possibly the coach road was not far off, and by continuing ahead she would find it. But she felt a curious indifference

on the subject. The heat had filled her with a delightful drowsiness, and she decided to rest a little longer. With her back against a tree she stared dreamily at the lovely slope of country over which the sunshine appeared to be passing in ripples making the long pale grass sway in waves, though not a breath of wind stirred the air. Everything seemed wrapped in a pleasant golden haze, but whether the haze was in her mind or on the golden silent land about her she could not have told. At last her eyes gradually closed and she slept.

. . . . . .

When she awoke the plain was still simmering under the sun waves, and leaves and grass crackled and stirred as before in the windless air. All was unchanged, except that at the top of the slope half a quarter of a mile away, a dozen or more buck were peacefully grazing among the pale long grass. Often from the coach Vivienne had seen such herds, and she knew the great dark creatures, with patches of white gleaming under them as they moved, to be sable antelope. Lazily she sat watching their slow graceful movements, as they fed, never dreaming of the presence of a human being, though sometimes one or another

of them would raise its head and for a moment seem to listen.

Then in an instant with the flash and crack of sudden doom the scene changed. The antelope terror-stricken, were bounding across country and the girl leaping to her feet stood with eyes dilated and hand on heart. A gun had been fired and the dark body of one of the buck lay shuddering where a moment before it had been happily grazing.

Even as she stood staring, the figure of a man came from behind a far group of bush into the open—a tall hulking figure, in sloppy trousers belted at the waist, his gun over his shoulder. He was a long way off, but he walked straight as a die for the spot where the buck lay, stooped over it for a minute, then wiped something he held in his hand on the grass and stuck it back into his belt. Afterwards he tied a little strip of white rag onto a bush close by. He stood for a while looking after the rest of the herd, now black dots in the distance, then leisurely started to walk back in the direction he came. Never once had he looked towards where Vivienne, motionless as a statue stood in the shadow of the trees.

As she watched him, his figure momentarily disappeared behind a bush, and then for the first time immobility passed from her face and figure.

Panic swept over her like a wave. Uttering short sharp cries, she began to run after the man, and, as she ran, the remembrance came over her like the memory of some frightful nightmare how she had run like this before—on and on and on —over rocks, through bush, in blinding sunshine and heavy darkness. And with the remembrance came such terror as lent wings to her feet—terror of losing sight of this human creature, and being left once more to the awful loneliness of the veld.

In a few moments she caught up to within thirty yards of the man, but long before that he had turned round and was watching her, his hat pushed back above his dark coarse face, his eyes full of astonishment.

"Hi! young fellah—stop that!"

If he had fired off his gun at her the result could not have been more effective. She drew up instantly, stopped tearing with both hands at the collar of her shirt, and stood staring into his eyes, panting heavily. He ran a shrewd glance over her.

"Where'd you spring from?" he demanded. She continued to stare at him. His voice which was common and brutal troubled her, and she did not like his face.

"Crazy!" he mused, looking at her keenly through half-closed eyes. "I'm not sure it wouldn't be a good thing to give you a crack on the cocoa-nut and leave you to the *asvogels*. You'll only be a darned nuisance."

She understood very well what he was saying, but somehow it did not terrify her. Nothing terrified her except the thought of being left alone. He tried her with another question.

"How long you been lost?"

She waved her hand towards the trees that fringed the river bank. Why she did this she had not the faintest idea.

"*Ach!*" he exclaimed impatiently, and turned on his heel. "Come on to my waggons, you fool."

Without any indignation at his way of addressing her, she fell into step beside him. A few paces farther on, two natives bounded into sight, coming towards the man as though searching for him. He addressed them in Kaffir, pointing backwards to where he had left the buck. They gazed at Vivienne with impassive faces. Both parties continued on their way.

At last Vivienne's eyes fell once more upon the broad dusty road, and a hundred yards or so from it two transport waggons were drawn up and out-

spanned. At the sight of them, and the smouldering fires, and a dog that jumped up barking, and the smell of newly-baked bread, something in the girl's breast gave a great throb, and she had speech.

"Since yesterday," she said, answering the question the man had asked her some twenty minutes past.

"Oh! you've found your tongue have you," said he. "Since yesterday what?"

"Lost."

"Lost since yesterday?" he stared at her wonderingly. "Oh! you're mad, right enough, young fellah. The sun's done *your* business for you. Here! come and eat."

She was not too mad to understand that at any rate. There were some loaves of newly-made dough bread lying on a box, each broken in two to let the steam out. Several other boxes were scattered about and the man motioning her to one handed her half a loaf. She took it eagerly, and began to eat at once, almost wolfishly. When she had finished she looked longingly at the other loaves.

"No, you don't," said the man, "you've had enough for one go." He had called out an order to some young native boys squatting by the fire, and they now set a tin kettle full of coffee and two

beakers before him. He handed her one of the beakers full of hot black liquid and she drank even to the last drop.

"Now," said he, speaking roughly and emphatically as if to a child with no intelligence. "What you want is *sleep*. Go and get up into that waggon tent, and *sleep*, do you understand? No use turning in on the ground for we're going to *trek* in an hour. Get off with you now, and sleep till you burst." His tone was the tone of a born bully, but the girl did not resent it. She climbed on to the waggon-brake as easily as if she had been doing so all her life. A rude, but not unclean mattress surged up to meet her, and she sank into it and slept.

. . . . . .

The waggon was moving when she awoke, a delicious slow movement which softly swung the mattress suspended on a wooden frame across the tent, from side to side, and was accompanied by strainings and rumblings, musical creakings as of a ship at sea, but without any of the malaise incidental to ships, for the level of the mattress was always maintained. When the wheels jolted over stones, Vivienne got no more discomfort of it than a bird snug in its nest. From the horseshoe

opening of the tent, she could see a light haze of dust rising perpetually from under the wheels, and through it, the landscape rolling out and retreating in changing panorama. Everything was wonderfully peaceful. Sometimes she could hear far ahead the crack of a whip, and a long-drawn-out native cry; then the waggon would lumber more hurriedly through the dust for a while, only to return to the slow even movement of serenely pacing oxen.

Lying idly against her pillow, she watched the sun fall swiftly behind a kop, and the whole land become suffused with orange-coloured light. Then the silver-green of bush and tree turned black and kopjes were etched in India ink against the tinted skies.

Her eyes wandered round the tent in which she was lying. There was hardly anything in it except the bed, but from the hoops supporting the canvas various odds and ends of things were hanging; a lantern, a cheap clock, a small tin-bound square of mirror, several coarse canvas bags, evidently stuffed with clothes.

"I suppose they belong to the man who found me," she thought, and instantly recalled the coarse thick-lipped face, the peculiar sneering way his mouth drew up at one side under the

ragged dark moustache, the sharp half-closed eyes. She recalled too his brutal way of speaking to her. No one had ever spoken to Vivienne Carlton in such a fashion, and it had impressed itself on her memory. In fact, it was the only thing that stood out since she knew she had lost herself by the pool. The rest was darkness.

"*Hi! Young fellah!*"

Her memory began from those words! But why "young fellah?" She had understanding now to marvel at such an address. Was it because of her short hair? The idea inspired her to kneel up on the bed and reach for the tin-backed mirror. She peeped in and, at the sight she met there, almost reeled backwards out of the waggon. A face which under dirt and tan was darker than a Hindoo's, scratched cheeks, sunken eyes, lips that were dried and cracked. A mop of short curly hair full of dust and bits of grass and dried leaves! A neck that was burnt almost black right down to where it met the ragged shirt collar. She could not even be sure that the eyes were her own, so deep were they in her head.

The shock sent her back to her pillow, and she lay there a long time very still. But her mind was clear enough now to realise why the man had mistaken her for a "young fellow." She was

a tall, athletic girl whose love of outdoor exercises had conformed her figure to a boyish flexibility and litheness rather than feminine plumpness. Moreover, such superfluous flesh as she had once possessed was now gone. The veld had turned her into a lanky, dirty, hungry-looking lout of a boy. She could not help laughing, but a moment later her face grew stern to consternation. The feeling of safety engendered by being once more in touch with people was dispersing the terror of the veld, but another horror now took its place! Her beauty was gone! The one great wand she possessed, the pivot round which all her plans revolved. It would take months to get back her complexion and contours—if she ever got them back!

She stared at her dark hands, blistered and torn, with black rims to them.

"How awful if this ever gets known!"

So far, the world with all its cruelty and malice had never been able to touch her spotless reputation, or Mrs. Grundy heave a brick at her for outraged conventions. But now? If this became known? Lost on the veld! Picked up by a strange man, kept in a waggon, travelling alone with him on the veld! What tit-bits to be rolled round the tongues of her enemies!

"It must never be known," she whispered to herself. "This man must go on believing me a boy. The whole business of my being lost must be kept dark, and I must get back to my world as soon as I can. I wonder if this man is bound for Rhodesia or going down-country!"

Ruefully, she examined her garments. Her riding-breeches and gaiters, though dirty and worn, would last a good while yet, but the soles of her boots were almost gone.

Daylight passed, and was superseded by a great white moon that diffused mother-of-pearl light. Hour after hour the waggon rumbled forward, but at last the wheels creaked over grass and shrub and came to a stop. There were native cries and shouts, the clatter of falling yokes, the low moo of tired oxen. Then newly lighted fires began to crackle and presently a ravishing odour of meat grilling over embers came stealing into the waggon tent. A head showed at the opening.

"Well! how d'you feel now, hey?"

"Better, thank you," she answered politely. Her voice was a contralto and quite deep enough to pass for a boy's.

"Oh! better, thank you, hey?" he rudely mimicked. "Ready for a buck steak, I bet!"

She did not at all like this man's ways and

manners, but it seemed politic at this time to disguise her feelings. For one thing, she was horribly hungry. For another, she realised that it was in his power to be intensely disagreeable if she offended him. Just how disagreeable a man with such a mouth could be she did not care to contemplate.

"I am certainly very hungry," she answered quietly.

"Come on down, then. You don't expect me to bring it to you, do you?"

"Of course not!" She made haste to descend, and take her place before the packing-case on which the supper was laid. She thought she had never tasted anything in her life so delicious as that chunk of antelope-steak, gritty with cinders, and flavoured with smoke. At the end of twenty minutes or so, the man remarked:

"Nothing wrong with your appetite, I see, whatever the sun has done to your *kop*."

Vivienne did not know what a *kop* was, but her guessing powers were unimpaired.

"I'm afraid my behaviour was rather strange when I first met you," she said stiffly. "My excuse must be that I am not accustomed to being lost, and the experience had—er—slightly unbalanced me."

"You were cracked as an over-ripe watermelon," he sneered, "and are still, for all I know." He lounged on his elbow, smoking a pipe of atrocious tobacco.

"At any rate I thank you for your hospitality," said she, longing to box his ears instead.

"Pugh! What I want to know is where you come from and whereabouts you left your party, hey?"

"My party?"

"Yes; the waggons you got lost from."

Something inspired her to leave it at that, and answer quietly:

"Our last stopping-place was Palapye."

"Palapye! Why, that's ten days' *trek* from here."

"Oh, no," she said. "I was at Palapye three days ago—two days before I lost myself."

"Look here! Have you any idea of the date you got lost on, hey?" She made a rapid calculation.

"But of course, it was the twenty-first of November—yesterday."

"That's all right," he said grimly. "This is the thirtieth." She sat staring at him, lips apart.

"You were lost in the bush nine days, and this is the tenth. I thought as much when I saw you."

"Nine days!" she muttered. "Is it possible——!"

Nine days,—alone on the veld—forever unaccounted for!—gone out of her life.

"Yes, nine days," he repeated grimly. "I suppose you got rid of most of your outfit—that's the usual game. I wonder you have on anything at all."

She wondered too, remembering the tales she had heard of lost people and thanked God for the unconscious feminine modesty that had remained to her even in madness and panic—restraining her from that last horror! A warmth crept into her face, but fortunately through the darkness of her skin the man could see nothing though he was studying her keenly.

"I had a camera—and a hat and coat," she muttered, trying to remember.

"*Ach!* Shut thinking about it or you'll go off your top again." She bit her lip at his rude tone, but it at least had the effect of bracing her.

"Where were you bound for, hey?"

"Buluwayo."

"Oh, indeed! We may run into your party then, for I'm bound there too."

She knew that the coach from which she was lost must have reached Buluwayo long ago, even

if they had delayed a day or two looking for her. But she did not say so. The hatefulness of the man made her wish to keep up as long as possible the fiction of friends close at hand.

"What's your name?" was the next question. She told him, "Carlton," and he repeated it contemptuously.

"A beastly swell, of course. I suppose you lost your eye-glass in the bush, hey? Well, Carlton, my fine fellah, just you understand this: If I've got to board and lodge you from here to Buluwayo or until your fine friends pick you up, I shall expect to be well paid for it; and don't you forget it."

"Of course you will be paid," she said coldly. "But I must ask you in the meantime to treat me with a little civility——"

He stared at her with sullen eyes.

"Civility be blowed! And don't you give me any of your cheek, you young snook, else you'll find yourself in the wrong box. Clear out now, I've had enough of you. You're welcome to the waggon tent as I never use it,—but don't you come near me again, except by special invitation."

This was the unpropitious beginning of Miss Carlton's new adventure. Often during the next two weeks she wondered whether she would not

have been wiser to have stayed in the bush. The man Roper, as she discovered his name to be, was an insufferable brute, and she went in mortal terror of his ever finding out that she was a woman. He ill-treated his boys shamefully, thrashing them on the smallest provocation, and never spoke to Vivienne except in a bullying tone. What nationality he was she could not imagine. From his constant use of such colonialisms as *Ach!* and *Hey!* he might have been a South African, but his accent was distinctly English, and he scoffed equally at both British and Boer, and seemed to have the good qualities of neither.

The one thing to be earnestly thankful for was that he had such a dislike to her that she was rarely troubled by his society. He invariably took his mid-day meal alone, the greater part of the day being spent in sleep, for like most transport drivers he never slept during the night *treks*. The hour of danger for Vivienne was at the night outspan, for it was then that Roper usually sent her a gruff message to join him at the meal that was both supper and breakfast in one—afterwards the whole camp would sink into slumber until nearly mid-day, except Vivienne who invariably utilised this time to wash and tidy

herself, though she never went far from the waggon, having a horror of once more losing herself.

Since she must see Roper then, evening was much the best time for the ordeal. Flickering firelight and the beams of a waning moon were less inimical than broad daylight to a rôle that became daily more difficult to play. For Vivienne was beginning to outgrow her disguise! True, few people would have recognised in the dirty, if healthy-looking young man in khaki, the erstwhile lovely débutante of a London Season, and more recently lady-correspondent of the *Daily Flag*. But life in the open with rest and food, were doing their work upon a healthy physique, and her beauty was rapidly returning. The heavy sunburn wearing off showed the skin beneath clear and tinted; her violet eyes had come out of retreat; her lips no longer cracked were a smooth and healthy red. Her hair, for the most part hidden under a primitive hat of plaited grass made for her by one of the *umfans*,[1] curled and glistened in the sun as though it were alive. It was with increased anxiety that she looked every day into the tin-backed mirror.

During the long afternoon *treks*, lying in the waggon tent her usual occupation was the study

[1] Young native boys.

of a letter she had found inside her blouse with no clear idea of how it came there. She wondered if it were possible that during that extraordinary period of mental aberration she had deliberately opened the letter of another person, but she preferred not to believe this.

At any rate, before she had solved the mystery of its origin she knew the thing off by heart, and now for lack of any better thing to do she daily pondered the matter of de Windt's farm. And one day the thought flashed into her mind. "If I were to get £500 and buy it instead of letting those two rogues at Onder-Koppies have it!" Instantly she dismissed the question with another—"Is this country utterly demoralising me?"—reminding herself sharply of who she was, and the obligations of her birth and honourable training. But later the thought came again, and with it extenuating arguments. After all, would such an act on her part be any more dishonourable than the one she contemplated—marrying some man for his money? The one was no more than a piece of sharp practice, such as business men did every day of their lives. The other—well at any rate it would be a far *pleasanter* way to fortune than the other!

Cogitating the matter until it made her head

ache, she fell asleep at last. It is wonderful how much sleep can be put in on the veld where the air seems charged with mingled ozone and wine!

At outspan time, which seemed to come earlier than usual, she descended to Roper's call, and slipped unassumingly into her place. Everything seemed much the same, but the moment she glanced at Roper she knew that something untoward had happened. The look she had so long dreaded was in his eye. *He knew.*

The discovery nearly suffocated her. She felt her face scorch as if by a swift flame, then all the blood drain from it, and tighten like a band round her heart. Opposite her, dark half-closed eyes full of malice and some other hateful quality passed over her in a gloating enveloping stare. If she had suddenly lost her appetite, so, too, it seemed, had he. It was with his eyes he feasted.

Utterly wretched and terrified, hardly knowing what she said, the girl made some attempt at conversation. He laughed strangely, answering her remark with another.

"The mail-coach passed this afternoon, and I had a few minutes' talk with the driver. He gave me a bit of news."

"Oh?" she faltered enquiringly, sick with

mingled fear and curiosity. Why, oh why, had not she been awake when that coach passed?

"It appears that a young lady was lost off the coach, week before last—much about the same place as you were—you didn't happen to meet her I suppose?" he leered at Vivienne with indescribable malice. She made no answer,—only with her hand sheltered her pallid face as best she could from the gleam of the fire.

"They were out looking for her some time—nearly a week—have given it up now, though—but all the coach drivers have orders to keep their eyes open. They wanted to know if I had seen anything of her? But of course I said no."

Brute! was what her sick heart cried, though her lips made no sound. There was a silence. He leaned on his elbows, smiling his slow evil smile at her, and she sat perfectly still looking through her fingers at the fire and the forms of the two *umfans* beside it, rolled in their blankets and already sleeping. No use calling to them, she knew, and the other boys were away with the oxen. In any case, all were too much under the dominion of Roper to stand by her. She realised that she was in deadly danger—and alone. For the first time in the last two years of proud and bitter defiance, she felt the need of some stronger spirit than her

own, and in her extremity her heart turned to God with a silent cry for help.

"I forgot to tell you," said Roper softly, "that *her* name was Carlton, too. Isn't that a funny thing now!"

"I don't think so," she found courage to say, though her eyes were the eyes of a hunted thing.

"No? Now I thought it the funniest thing I ever heard," said he laughing softly, "and ever since, I have been saying to myself, 'What a pity it wasn't the young lady I found!' It would be so pleasant on an evening like this for instance, to have the society of a nice young lady! So very pleasant," he repeated, and leaned on the table looking into her eyes with some horrible meaning. "Quite alone on the veld, with no one to know or care what we did—no one to—interfere—all alone with love and the daisies." With a swift movement he caught hold of the girl's hand which was lying on the table. But the next instant he had loosed it and was on his feet.

"Who the devil ——?"

A man had come into the camp. Swift-footed and noiseless as a ghost, neither the dog nor the sleeping *umfans* had heard his coming. It was almost as if he had sprung from a neighbouring bush and Vivienne, startled as Roper by the sudden

apparition, rose to her feet. But apart from his quietness, and the gleam of his light clothes, there was nothing supernatural about the tall lithe shirt-sleeved figure which with rifle on shoulder and revolver on hip, came into the firelight. Nothing supernatural either, but something indescribably soothing to the nerves of Vivienne Carlton in the sound of that cheerful, careless voice.

"Ah, gentlemen! Hope I did not startle you? I'm delighted to come upon your camp, having mislaid my own by a few miles. I shall be glad to spend the night here if you have no objection?"

Roper turned his back and with a sullen scowling face sat down again, muttering some words that sounded anything but inviting. The stranger took no offence. He also sat down opposite the girl, and began to relate how he had left his boys and gone after a buck and got too far away to bother to return that night — and all the time he was looking steadily across the packing-case at Vivienne and she saw that he recognised her, even as she recognised him as soon as she saw his light grey eyes. It was the silent, tanned man who had left the coach at Palapye.

PART II

THE three sat round the fire awhile, unspeaking, each busy with their own thoughts. Whatever were Roper's his face grew more sullen every moment, and the glances he cast in the direction of the new-comer were full of malignance. He looked menacingly too at Vivienne, who had suddenly taken on such a feminine appearance that he was amazed he could have been deceived so long. Her intense pallor and the dilation of her eyes through fear or excitement until they looked like great sombre pools of fire may have had something to do with the phenomena, but there she was, spite of the travesty of masculine attire, glowing like some beautiful night-blooming magnolia. And she said nothing; just sat very still behind the packing-case, watching the two men.

As for the stranger, he had taken up an easy position on one of the boxes which were always lying about the camp, and with his rifle beside him, leaning forward elbows on knees, began to fill his pipe. No hospitality of any kind was offered

him. Just as he was about to light up, he gave a half glance in the direction of the girl, and for a moment she was afraid he was going to ask for her permission to smoke, but it must have been fancy on her part for he lit without speaking.

"I hope your waggons are not far off," said Roper suddenly. "For I've no idea of turning mine into a sort of refuge for lost dogs." His tone was extremely offensive. The other man looked at him steadily for a long moment, then said with a gentleness almost deadly:

"I don't see any dogs about here—except one."

It is true that Roper's pointer was asleep under the waggon not far off, but the stranger did not happen to be looking that way. Roper was at liberty to like the inference or lump it, whichever he pleased. Perhaps the cheerful flicker on the bright barrels of the stranger's .303 helped his decision not to lump it, for his tone was less aggressive when he spoke again.

"What I mean is, I've had enough of picking up and feeding and lodging people who choose to get lost on the veld. I'm full up with it. I didn't lay in provisions against such accidents."

"Oh!" said the stranger, still gently. "Have you had many of the kind?"

"Yes; one too many," was the retort.

Vivienne thought this the time and place to make a statement. "I am the unfortunate accident," she said in a low voice. "I was lost on the veld some three weeks or more ago, and this man Roper found me, and has been supplying me ever since with food and a waggon tent to sleep in. He seems to resent having to do it so much, however—in spite of my assurance that he will be well paid—that I should be only too glad to leave this camp if I could."

This was tantamount to an appeal and she anticipated and hoped that the stranger would immediately offer her the refuge of his camp. To her mortification, he merely looked reflective.

"I see," he said; then casually to Roper: "Well, you needn't worry about me. I shall not encroach upon your provisions."

"Very glad to hear it," commented Roper, brusquely. "As for you, young fellah," he turned his dark glance on Vivienne, "I don't see what you've got to complain of. You have always had civil treatment from me and the best of whatever was going. Fine gratitude to turn on me now!"

The girl was silent for a moment, nonplussed by the stranger's indifference, and the thought that perhaps after all his presence there was only an

accident, that he did not mean to help her, and would go off to-morrow without a word, leaving her once more in the power of Roper! She determined that at any rate he should not be in any doubt as to her position.

"I'm not complaining without cause," she said, looking at Roper scornfully; "you have repeatedly spoken most insultingly about being obliged to give me hospitality, and to-night your manner was so offensive that I was very glad to see this gentleman come into camp."

"*Ach!* you're a fool to get scared at my jokes. I've even forgotten what it was we were talking about. Whatever it was, I should have thought a big strapping fellow like you could have taken his own part."

He laughed blusteringly, and she realised that he did not suspect the other man knew of her identity, and that he meant to keep up the fiction she herself had begun. Doubtless, he, too, expected the stranger to be gone with the dawn before he could make any further discoveries!

It seemed at any rate that there was nothing further to be done for the moment, or until she could be sure of the man whose name she did not even know, or whether he knew hers! After all, had he recognised her? Had she been mistaken in

the meaning of that swift look given her when their eyes first met, that seemed to say: "All's well! I am your friend!"

Surely he must remember her! Yet what had she done to be remembered by? Nothing. She had held herself aloof in disdainful pride from him as from all the others. She knew now that she had always felt an interest in this silent light-eyed man, who never seemed to look at anything but the horizon, and had felt more instinctively akin to him than the others. Still, she had never given any outward sign that he was not, as Laurence Hope has it, "less than the dust beneath her chariot wheels," and had treated him to the same civil disdain with which she froze the other passengers. Oh! would he remember it against her now?—if he remembered her at all!

Her eyes searched his face almost pleadingly; but it told nothing. He had crossed his legs easily, and with one hand nursing his elbow, the other holding his pipe, sat smoking in impenetrable reflection.

Well! it was something to have him here. His very presence gave her a feeling of protection. One of the *umfans* made a diversion by rising like a somnambulist from his dreams to throw a great heap of fuel on the fire. Mechanically, he per-

formed his task, then, without looking to east or west, rolled himself to sleep again.

"You keep up your fires all night—here?" remarked the stranger.

"I always keep them up—it gives those brutes something to do," was Roper's surly response. "And why not, about here?"

"Oh, it's a good general plan. But there isn't any particular need round here. No lions. A stray hyena or two is the worst you'll strike."

"You seem to know all about it," sneered Roper, his straggly moustache lifted to one side in the usual unlovely manner.

"I ought to. I helped to make that road." The stranger slightly indicated the wide and dusty main track fifty yards off. Roper gaped a moment or two.

"Ah! a blessed pioneer!" he said at last, but there was no benediction in his tone. "And a mighty rotten road it is," he was presently inspired to remark.

"Yes," said the stranger placidly, "roads are like dogs—and some men—they soon go to pot if they are not kept in order."

Roper digested this as best he might, but the process did not appear to agree with him.

"No one seems to realise that it's nearly one

o'clock in the morning," he suddenly snarled. "Get off to bed, youngster." He added to the stranger: "If you're going to make tracks for your waggons at dawn, I should advise you to get some sleep too."

"Thanks, I'm not sleepy—but I'll turn in when you do."

"Well, I'm going now. The youngster has the tent. I roll up under the waggon."

"I'll roll up beside you," announced the stranger pleasantly. "But I hope you don't snore, for I am a light sleeper, and wake at the slightest sound." He happened to be looking steadily into the eyes of Vivienne as he said this.

"The blazes you do!" burst out Roper violently, as though this were the last straw. "Well, I don't care a hang whether you sleep or not."

"Thanks," answered the other imperturbably.

Vivienne spent a wakeful night. As a matter of fact, snoring was not an accomplishment of Roper's, so she was unable to gather from the silence that reigned under the waggon whether either or neither of the men slept. She lay straining her ears for what seemed ages, but the only break in the silence was the sound of the *umfan* at his mechanical duty of replenishing the fire, until, in the dark hour just before dawn,

she was aroused from an uneasy doze by a faint movement at the opening of the tent. She lay dead still, and for one moment her heart seemed to miss a beat. In the darkness she could see nothing by which to judge whether the person near were friend or foe, but suddenly her heart beat again, for a faint fragrance of Navy Cut tobacco had come stealing into the tent, and she knew that fragrance well. She had sat next to it for many days in a coach. Very different that to the rank odour of Roper's Boer *tabak*.

Then, silently and swiftly, a small heavy object, cold and polished to the touch slid in beside her. Her hand slipped round it, and another hand closed for an instant on hers, then withdrew. No word was spoken.

As soon as it was light enough, she examined her new possession, though her fingers had long since informed her of its character. A beautiful Colt's, loaded in all its five chambers. A tiny leaf of paper tucked into the barrel bore a few scribbled words:

"*Use this if necessary. Don't worry about consequences. I'll look after those. Kerry.*"

Part of the "y" of "Kerry" had been left behind in the note book from which the leaf was torn.

. . . . . .

"Well! our friend the gallant pioneer has gone, hey?"

It was the first time Roper had ever come near the waggon-tent while she was in it, and the coincidence was not lost upon Vivienne. He sat on the brake now, face level with the mattress, and looked in with a triumphant leer on his degenerate face. But his news was no news to her. She had climbed down softly as soon as it was light, according to her usual custom, and made for herself the discovery that the stranger was gone. It was no more than she expected. The gift of the revolver had meant nothing if it had not meant that he would not be there to use it himself in case of need. The knowledge that it reposed under the pillow close to her hand was of great service to her nerves at the present moment, enabling her to answer Roper with an air of nonchalance that surprised him.

"I daresay he will soon catch us up again."

"Oh, *do* you? And what makes you daresay that, hey?"

She moved her shoulders in a slight disdainful movement, to express that he and his question bored her intolerably, but for all her assumed carelessness she was on the alert. It was as

much for her own reassurance as for his annoyance that she remarked:

"His waggons can't be far off, or he wouldn't have reached us on foot last night."

"Ah!" Roper sat gazing at her, his moustache lifted sideways, the shadow of a sneering smile under his half-closed lids. It was patent to her that he was meditating something malignant, though what it was she could not at present fathom. No word did he speak on the subject of their last night's interrupted conversation: but his glance, travelling over her in slow gloating detail, was eloquent of much that his tongue left unsaid; and though her eyes met his with scornful contempt, she could feel the colour mounting in her cheeks and passing over her face from chin to hair in a hot wave. And the sight was not lost on Roper. Laughing in his throat in a way that chilled her blood, he jumped from the brake and walked away.

Immediately afterwards, he let loose a storm of abuse upon the *umfans*, who began to scuttle round the camp like frightened squirrels. It was unusual for him to be stirring in the camp at such an early hour, and this was their time to be cutting their own little capers while they collected fuel and stowed it on the other waggon for the night

fires. Roper now diverted them from this to the task of clearing up camp. Then Vivienne heard him get down the ox-whip from the side of the waggon and begin to swirl the lash round and round in the air. A moment later the revolver-like crack of the huge whip went ringing and echoing across the veld and she understood. It was the sign for the return of the oxen! He meant to begin the afternoon *trek* about five hours earlier than usual!

Thus, when the stranger, secure in the knowledge that all transport riders give their oxen from ten to twelve hours for rest and grazing, caught up to the present outspan, it would be to find Roper gone with a five hours' start. And once let anyone get five hours' start of you on the veld it will take stiff running to catch up. A man with oxen in less robust condition than Roper's might never catch up! This was the situation Vivienne had to face, and, thanks to the Colt, she was able to face it without panic. But her heart was somewhere in the vicinity of her boots as she watched the weary oxen come trampling back from their short respite. Seeming to know that they had been robbed of their legitimate rest, they kicked and butted each other, ran round the waggons, and gave as much trouble

as they could. Many a bad and bitter word went to their yoking, but at last they were under weigh, raising clouds of dust as they took the road.

It was soon clear that Roper did not mean to let things go at the usual easy pace. He kept the lash over his beasts, running beside them like a man possessed, cracking and swirling the long whip-thong in the air, letting out astonishing cries, and long streams of words which though incomprehensible to the uninitiated ear left, by the violent sound of them, no doubt as to their character, every injunction ending in a ferocious command to "*Yak!*"

The oxen at an incredible pace shuffled and clappered along, the waggon spite of its heavy load bounding and swaying at their heels. Sometimes Roper, a menacing figure covered with dust, appeared round the end of the waggon and dropped back a few paces on the road, thereby enabling himself to see well into the tent where Vivienne sat guarding her shaking soul behind a calm and unapprehensive manner. Nearly always he would laugh—a laugh that made the girl grip the revolver under the pillow. A moment later she would hear his voice adjuring the oxen with a savage "*Yak!*"

It must have been about four o'clock in the

afternoon when she found herself suddenly face to face with him in the opening of the tent. With such unexpected agility had he sprung upon the brake that for the moment she was taken unawares, and might easily have been outgeneralled, but for his cocksureness that he was master of the situation. He stood there smiling his slow evil smile —giving her time to shift farther into the tent and lay her hand on the stock of the revolver.

"What do you want?" she demanded evenly.

He assumed an air of hurt surprise.

"I suppose I can have a ride in my own waggon if I want to?"

"Not here," she said in a firm voice. "You must go and ride where you have always ridden. This tent has been given over to me and I mean to keep possession of it."

"Oh, you wouldn't be so unkind," he said with a slimy smile, and made to mount his knee on the mattress and clamber in, but found himself nose to nose with the shining steel barrel.

"If you stir a hand, I fire." Her voice was absolutely steady. "Get down!"

His utterly dumbfoundered look and the alacrity with which he loosened his hold on the side of the tent and dropped from the brake was funny. But his face was not funny. Something in it

made Vivienne shiver. His mouth under the tilted moustache worked as if it tasted poison, and his eyes were bad to see. Down in the road he looked upwards once more to where Vivienne sat, the weapon lowered, but still in sight.

"So that's it?" he muttered. "He left you his revolver, did he?"

It was plain, of course, that she could have come by it in no other way. He walked behind awhile blinking and swallowing the dust, considering perhaps the problem of how much she had told the other man. Then silently in his veld-schoened feet he passed to the side of the waggon, and for the time being she saw him no more.

Nor even heard him. The tent on a buck-waggon is so placed that when the latter is loaded there is no way of entering or seeing from the tent except from the brake end. The whole of the back opening was blocked with heavy packing-cases that could not have been budged except by the efforts of several men. Vivienne congratulated herself on that for it made for safety. But it also kept her in ignorance of what was going forward in the front part of the waggon, or even at the sides. All she could do through that long bright hot afternoon was to sit like Sister

Anne in her tower watching the road down which help might come.

When she observed that the waggon was no longer on the road, she was instantly on the alert for the meaning of the new move. It was too early to outspan, and if Roper did so he must know that he could easily be caught up, for they had not been travelling more than three hours! But they did not stop. They went crashing on over shrub and bush, lurching against ant-hills, being torn at by the branches of trees.

At last, the terrified girl realised what was happening. Roper was leaving the road and all danger of interference from those who might be travelling on it, and making for the wild bush!

What should she do? Jump down and run? He might, expecting that, be lurking beside the waggon, and spring upon her while her hands in descending were yet engaged in holding the quickly moving waggon. There was a subtle cunning about the fellow that terrified her. Better stay in the tent where at least she had her face to the foe, and her back guarded by packing-cases. Besides, to where could she run? Back to the bush, to be lost once more, perhaps for ever this time? No, better stay and fight it out; die fighting, if necessary. That was what the

man had given the gun for. And he meant to come back. She felt sure of that. She trusted him. But would he come in time?

On and on went the waggon, lurching and swaying over the rough ground. Once a dead branch ripped open the roof of the tent and a long slit of blue sky showed through. Another time a back wheel sank deep into a hole, and the whole waggon tipped over to such an angle that Vivienne found herself standing on the canvas ribs of the tent with her back keeping up the mattress and bedding. It took much hooting and hauling, two boys working with a crowbar, and Roper lashing, and howling terrible imprecations at the oxen before they pulled out and went lumbering on. The sun began to sink, and the skies to turn blood red with the trees inked against them. The approaching night looked menacing and full of danger. The girl crouched in the tent holding fast to the revolver.

"Oh, this Africa! What terrible things she has done to me, and is doing! What terrible things has she still in her hand? '*Out of Africa always something new,*' indeed! Pliny knew something when he wrote that! Oh, man Kerry, do not fail me! Come soon!"

She kept saying that last sentence over and

over again, like a prayer. Sometimes it seemed to her the only prayer she knew. The night fell abruptly, as pitch black as if some monstrous bat had spread its wings and blotted out the light. There was no moon, and storm clouds had defaced the stars. Since first she came to the veld, Vivienne had never seen a night so black, so filled with brooding abysmal loneliness.

At last, the waggon stopped. Yokes began to clatter and fall, and the tired beasts lowed moodily as they moved away. The flicker of a swiftly lighted fire sprang up, casting knife-like shafts of light through the heavy darkness, and the weary, nerve-wrung girl in the tent, tense as an overstrung violin, braced herself for she knew not what fresh ordeal of terror might be awaiting her in this silent lonely spot. She was well aware that it was of no use relying on any help from the cowed native boys. There was nothing to hope from anyone, or anything, but her own courage and the revolver. She had a sudden, swift vision of the light-eyed man who had left it with her, and a little involuntary cry burst from her heart at the thought of him.

"Oh, Kerry!—come!"

She would never have known that she had cried the words aloud but for the immediate answer

that came in a casual, confident voice she seemed to have known all her life.

"All serene—don't worry."

Something loomed large and white below the brake, but the voice seemed to be on a level with her, and almost she fancied she could catch the gleam of his eyes in the enveloping darkness. She was too shaken with joy and relief to make any response, neither was there time, for Roper raging and profane arrived upon the scene.

"What the —— ? Who the —— ?" came his infuriated voice.

"I've had a hard time catching you up," drawled the stranger. "Why, my good fellow, what kind of transport rider are you? You've lost the road! I wonder what Deary & Co. would say if they knew their goods were being battered and bundled all over the veld like this, miles off the track?"

The rage of the baffled Roper came down like a river in flood, a foul torrent of abuse in Dutch and Kaffir mingled with English. Fortunately, most of it was incomprehensible to Vivienne, but she was able to gather that the man on the horse, Deary & Co., the goods, and the veld, were all being consigned *en bloc* to a place whose

exact geographical position has never yet been officially defined.

The fire now burning brightly revealed the newcomer seated idly on a large white tailless horse, which in outline somewhat resembled a grey hound and whose lean sides were closely pitted with tiny blue spots as though it had at some past time suffered from smallpox. The rider in his shirt sleeves looked cool and careless as always, but the hair lying dank upon his forehead and the soapy foam upon his horse's flank told a tale which whoever ran might read. He now, with the subsidence of Roper's eloquence, contributed his favourite remark to the occasion.

"*That's* all right."

"What the Billy-cock-hat" (or words to that effect) "do you want, hey?" demanded Roper.

"Just company. The pleasant time I spent with you last night gave me a taste for more. Then too I was sure you'd be glad of my assistance in finding your way back to the road to-morrow, without being obliged to lose several days in doubling on your tracks. Deary & Co. are particular friends of mine. and I know they'll be grateful for anything I can do in the way of speeding up their goods."

Some part of this information, or the nonchal-

ance with which it was delivered gave Roper pause, and made him swallow any further observations he might have felt inclined to offer. He turned away muttering in savage tones something about his boys having "left the road" while he slept. The lie was an obvious one, but the stranger doubtless had his own reason for accepting it blandly and without comment. He now dismounted, unsaddled and knee-haltered his horse, and turned it to graze. Without taking further notice of Roper or anyone else, he proceeded to gather fuel from the neighbouring bush, and in a short time had a great fire of his own leaping in the gloom. He had built it some twenty yards or more from the waggons, but exactly facing Vivienne's watch tower, and by its rays she could see him foraging in his saddle-bags and preparing a meal. He made no attempt to communicate with her or amalgamate in any way with Roper's camp. She wondered a little at this, but had already learned to rely upon the certainty of his knowing what he was about, and having a good reason for his every action. Since the moment she heard the unexpected sound of his voice, a feeling of peace and security had invaded her. Her strung nerves were at rest, and menace had gone from the night with the knowledge that this man

was of those who took the fate of others in his hands and that hers was for the moment in his keeping.

A drowsy weariness had followed upon the strain of the afternoon, and her inclination was to sleep, but the sight of her knight-errant taking his supper in a very natural and everyday manner made her wonder whether she ought not to do the same, not only for the sake of keeping up appearances, but to preserve her health in case of emergencies. So when an *umfan* came as usual to tell her that the dinner was ready, she descended from the waggon, and strolling over to the packing-case took her place as though nothing in the world had happened.

But sitting opposite a face which wore baffled rage and spite printed on every line of it was not a pleasant experience, and she was glad to look past it sometimes to a figure lying full length, smoking peacefully by a fire. The man Kerry never once glanced their way, but Vivienne was curiously aware of his being on the alert for every sound and movement in the camp. She knew very well that he could hear her say to Roper that it would be a pleasant act of courtesy to send over a cup of coffee to the stranger who evidently had no kettle in which to make any, and Roper's surly response to the suggestion.

"Look here! Do you take me for a damn-fool Samaritan?"

"No, indeed!" she retorted dryly. "But I thought that even you might be inclined to perform an act of common decency."

"Well, you thought wrong. I told you before that my waggon wasn't a hotel for lost, stolen, or strays, didn't I?"

Her only answer was to emphatically refuse the cup of coffee proffered her by an *umfan*. The rest of the meal was accomplished in silence.

Back in her tent once more, she composed herself for the night, revolver to hand, her face towards her friend. He had made another collection of fuel, and evidently meant to keep a big fire going all night. Something in the quiet way he had settled himself, half seated against his saddle, told her that he meant to keep watch.

Also, he had produced a book, and was leaning forward in the firelight ruffling its pages, and softly whistling to himself. A wave of pleasure tingled through the girl as she recognised the air for one she had known and loved all her life; that exquisite setting by Mendelssohn and Lizst to Heine's poem *On Wings of Song*. She was strangely thrilled to hear its dear familiar cadence in this wild spot. Like the twinkle of

home-lights seen suddenly from afar by a lost wayfarer, it gladdened and put fresh courage into her heart. How strange it seemed that this shirt-sleeved man who seemed part and parcel of primitive Africa, whom she had looked upon as a sort of Boer, should know anything so exquisitely civilised as the "*Auf Flügeln des Gesanges!*" She lay listening dreamily, her mind putting Heine's words to the frail haunting air.

On wings of song, Belov'd One,
Away I'll waft thee, to where
I know in the plains of the Ganges
A secret nook most fair.

There sleeps a rich blossoming garden,
Calm in the still moonlight:
The lotus flowers are awaiting
Their dearest Sister to-night.

The violets laugh as they prattle,
And gaze on the stars in their spheres;
Odorous legends the roses breathe
Low in each other's ears.

There bound, and stand shyly listening,
The gentle timid gazelles;
Afar, from the sacred river,
The waves' deep murmur swells.

There under the palms reclining,
We'll drink by the sacred stream
Of love and rest in full measure,
And blissful dreams will we dream.

On Wings of Sleep it should have been called, she thought, for the whole thing was a dream that could only come in sleep. It occurred to her at last that the man Kerry thought so too, and meant his persistent though soft whistling as a hint to her to sleep while he kept watch. It seemed indeed the best thing she could do, so that later when he was tired out she in turn could keep guard. Already Roper had got down his blankets, and she knew by the lowered tones of the *umfans* that he had retired under the waggon.

Wearied out by the various emotions of the day, it did not take her long to fall asleep, but several times during the night she awoke, prompted by a restless fear which even through her dreams vaguely disturbed her. But always there was calm in the camp, and always the man Kerry sat intent on his little book. The storm clouds had gone by, and the sky, shroudy and mysterious as the blue veil of an Eastern woman, was hung with jewels that shed a misty luminance over the immense and silent land.

When she finally threw off sleep in the small hours before dawn it was to find Kerry still lying there on his elbow placidly smoking. His book was still in his hand, but he appeared to be reading the fire rather than it. Vivienne wondered how she could let him know that she was awake and able to take up the vigil, but with the *Wings of Song* still haunting her memory she did not wonder long. Very softly she began to whistle the air. He stirred, and glanced towards the tent. She whistled delicately on, and saw a slow smile flicker for a moment across his impassive face. Then he closed his book and lowered his head to the saddle. He understood. She stopped whistling. He slept, and she vigilled until the stars turned white and the hand of Dawn pushed them back from sight, and in their place scattered red and golden roses across the skies.

Full morning brought new factors into the game. Two sinewy Bechuana boys came light-foot up the trail of broken trees and crushed ant-hills made by Roper's waggons, and approaching Kerry set down the heavy packages from their heads and gravely saluted him. An *indaba* ensued, accompanied by an arm-wave or two at the track by which they had come, some soft clicking remarks, and a few low sighs. Kerry, his pipe

in his teeth, listened reflectively, and at the end of the recital gave a brief order to each. One went away to the horse, the other proceeded to make a cooking fire and unpack one of the loads which obviously contained provisions.

Vivienne, who had been for a little morning walk, and now sat on a rock some distance away, saw Roper, much intrigued, watching the proceedings from under his waggon. When he could no longer contain his curiosity he slouched over to Kerry.

"What's all this? Whose boys are these?"

"Mine. Any objection to them?"

"Well!—What the Halifax?—How do you travel then? Where is your waggon?"

"I can't remember ever having mentioned a waggon," was the imperturbable answer.

That was the secret of it all then! He had no waggon. Only a horse and two native carriers. Vivienne to whom the whole conversation came clear on the morning air witnessed also Roper's stupified amazement.

"So you're just hanging on to me?" he snarled at last.

"I like pleasant company."

"To Jerusalem with you—well, *I* don't!"

"It's a free country." Kerry's manner was

unfailingly suave, but at this juncture he arose from the mound on which he was seated and made it clear that as far as he was concerned the conversation was closed. There was nothing left for Roper but to return to his own business of making things as unpleasant as possible for everyone in his camp. All through that torrid day he prowled and swore around his waggons, furiously tinkering and greasing and patching up the injuries they had sustained during the forced *trek*, giving his boys no rest from labour and abuse. But never once did he come near Vivienne, nor throw her a glance. She sat in her tent most of the day, mending a hole in the knee of her knickerbockers or staring at the sunlit land about her.

Thus it was from day to day. The two parties *trekked* and outspanned together as though they were one, yet after the first day never a word passed between them. Kerry made no attempt to communicate with Vivienne. Roper never spoke to Kerry. Vivienne passed her days unmolested by Roper.

The objectionable feature of the affair was Roper's offensive habit of airing in a loud voice at the night outspan his opinion of "loafers" and "hangers-on"—men who "followed like jack-

als the waggon of another man, having none of their own." Kerry might have been a stock or a stone for all the sign he gave of hearing any of these things. But Vivienne's cheek burned for him, and at times she felt a curious impatience that one who had taken upon himself the chivalrous affair of guarding her should be able to put up with such insults. She could not help thinking that since he was there for her protection a simple way out of an odious situation would be for him to say: "Look here; come over to my camp, and I'll take care of you, and let this fellow go to the deuce. Certainly you will have to rough it with me, but you have to rough it in any case with this lout." She would have gone like a bird from a cage. In fact, she could not understand how any chivalrous man could fail to see that it was the only dignified thing to do, especially when Roper began presently to be ironical to her on the subject of her condescension in staying in his camp. One evening he remarked to her rudely:

"I wonder you don't go and take up your quarters with your pal the Pioneer, instead of housing in my tent."

She was furious that the Pioneer, smoking not twenty yards off, took no more notice than if he were deaf or a fish. It seemed to her that patience

might go a little too far, and a chill disdain began to take root in her soul.

And then one day she realised that it was rather a good thing after all that he had not invited her to leave Roper's waggon to join his own unsheltered caravan. That was the day on which the heavy lowering heat broke at last in a storm such as she had never known in her life. When trees and iron rocks leaped in flame and fell under splitting flashes of lightning, thunder seemed to explode upwards from the bowels of the earth to meet an answering detonation in the heavens, and rain came down like grey straight rods of steel, battering the road into a liquid, quivering mass of mud.

At the first warning peal, Roper had drawn his waggons to a standstill, covered everything with great bucksails and retired under the shelter of one, while the boys took shelter under the other. Peering from ant-eaten holes in her bucksail, Vivienne could just distinguish through the heavy curtain of rain her rear-guard escort—the white horse with drooping head and drapery of mackintosh, and a tall figure sheltering to leewards of it. The carriers with the instinctive art of natives had found some cranny of shelter somewhere, but Kerry and his horse got the full brunt of the storm.

In less than an hour, it was all over. A tur-

quoise sky burned overhead, vivid orange sunshine drew clouds of incense from tree and earth and rock. The quivering mud of the roadway was the only unsightly evidence of what had passed—that and the drenched forms of a man and beast whom Roper mocked obliquely by calling up to Vivienne:

"Nice weather for jackals, hey? I've just been waiting for this! We'll have it every day now the wet season has set in."

The girl's heart sank. But it was to sink lower yet in the days that followed when Roper's words came true and the storm faithfully repeated itself. She began to wonder then whether she had not misjudged the Pioneer, and to realise that possibly his knowledge of the country and the climate had something to do with the regulation of his temper to Roper's sneers. It was clear at any rate that if she had left the waggon and sought refuge with him she, too, would have had to weather the blinding storms that came and went every day regularly as clockwork, always leaving the country fresh and fragrant as a rose. Except for the roads! The going grew heavier daily and in that at least triumph was not all on Roper's side, for while he was obliged to keep to the morass-like track or risk capsize, Kerry's horse could pick its way

delicately between rocks and ant-holes at the roadside. After the first day or two of wet weather the native bearers disappeared, and Kerry's horse bore the weight of an extra bundle.

It was a despairing experience to watch man and horse half-drown every day, then dry in clouds of steam under the brilliant sunshine that followed, and Vivienne sickened of it. She knew, too, that however strong the man, such an experience could not go on indefinitely without affecting his health, and she trembled for the day when he would perhaps fall ill of fever or pneumonia. Fortunately that day never dawned. One morning just as the sun was bursting forth after a terrible downpour, and the bucksails were being removed from the waggons, the blare of a coach horn came sailing through the air and a sound of mules' hoofs flapping in the mud. Vivienne almost jumped out of her skin with joy at the sight of a mail-coach, empty of everything but the driver and a mass of mail-bags.

Within twenty minutes, she was stowed inside the cart tent, the white horse was switched on behind, and the drawn-up coach waited only on the convenience of Kerry who before he could take his place in the cart wished to change his soaking clothes for some he had dried overnight. The

bush being his only retiring-room he prepared to take his bundle thither, but first he stepped over and addressed a curt remark to Roper scowling beside his waggon.

"Come along with me!"

"Come with you? I'll see you up a gum-tree first."

"Very well. You can take what's coming to you here instead if you prefer it."

"What do you mean?" Roper's face was belligerent but he began to back. The other's eyes, suddenly grown very steel-coloured, had taken a kind of measuring glance into them.

"Just this, that you don't surely suppose you're going to be let off for your infernal cheek of the past ten days?—and all the annoyance you have caused this gentleman here?" (He slightly indicated Vivienne.)

"*Gentleman!*" sniggered Roper, but got no further, for his mouth was stopped in a very rude and unkind manner. Vivienne's heart gave a leap at the sound of the blow. Never before had she seen a man thrashed, nor any kind of brute violence used by one man to another. A month or two back, the very idea of such a thing would have made her sick, probably have caused her to faint. It is certain that she would, out of very

hatred of violence, have sided with the aggressed, whatever his crime, against the aggressor. It showed how Africa had steeled her nerves and readjusted her sense of values that she could sit through the scientific and very thorough punching to which the transport driver was treated, without turning a hair.

Afterwards, Roper's boys, with a jubilation of manner never before observed in them, removed their master to the shade of his waggon and administered whiskey, while the man Kerry went away to wash his hands and make a quick change. The post-cart driver, a swarthy half-Dutch colonial, who talked the most extraordinary language Vivienne had ever heard, beguiled the tedium of waiting with anecdotes of Roper's past.

"*Maar!* it was *lekker* to see dat *slegte skepsel* get it good and red! *Ach! sis ja*, he's de worst stinkhond on dis road. I knowed him well *daar bij de Kaap*. *Ja wat!* he done ten years mealie-meal pap on de Cape Town break-water already for I.D.B., and another five years in de Bloemfontein *tronk* for half murdering an *arme kind* of a Hottentot girl. He hit her on de head with a *klip*, *wat! Allemagtie! sis*, yes, he's a *vaabond*. I seen him do some dirty jobs between here and

Mafeking. *Verneuking* de Kaffirs and hammering his boys for *niks nie*. *Ek seh ver jou*, dere isn't nothing what dat *verdomde bliksem* wouldn't do!"

Vivienne could well believe it. Such of the narrative as was comprehensible to her made her more deeply realise what her danger had been and how much she owed to the protection of Kerry. Her heart glowed with a warmth and gratitude she had never expected to feel again for anyone as she saw him returning, fresh from his dip and change, nonchalant as ever.

"Oh, how good you've been to me! What should I have done if you had not come!" she cried, and put out her hands to his in a gesture as charming as it was spontaneous.

"That's all right," he said easily. But impassivity went out of his face and darkness came into his eyes for a moment as he touched her hands. Then they sat side by side behind the driver while the mules spattered onwards through the mud. She recounted to him all she could remember of her adventure from the time she knew herself lost until Roper's appearance roused her from the mental lethargy into which panic and privation had plunged her. But of the ten days' gap in between she could tell him no more than if she had returned from the dead.

"Only it seems like a miracle that you should have come upon the scene just when you did!"

"It was lucky I left the coach at Palapye," he said reflectively. But he did not mention why he had done so. "When I got back some days later, there was no way of proceeding except by taking a horse and a couple of bearers."

"Did you hear then that I was lost?"

"Yes," he said briefly. "The Government had people out searching for you, but you must have travelled at a great rate. I expect you'll want to wire to let people know you are all right as soon as we get near a telegraph office?"

"I suppose so," she said slowly. "Unless it would be possible to just arrive and say nothing as to where I have been, and about that awful time with Roper. I should like that above all." She looked at him appealingly and then at her grimy clothes. "It would be terrible to run the gauntlet like this!"

"We must think up something," he said.

"It is only a matter of clothes to arrive in," she said presently. "I expect I shall find my baggage all safely there."

"Of course. Well, the best plan will be for me to drop you at Fisher's half-way house, a day's drive from Buluwayo. I'll proceed by coach and

send you back whatever you need, and some kind of conveyance to come on by. The woman at Fisher's is a quiet, half-dazed Dutch creature who won't talk if she sees you enter a young man and go forth a young woman."

She coloured slightly, conscious suddenly of her grimy knickerbockers and rush hat. Then their eyes met and they both fell into a rush of laughter that broke the last strand of stiffness between them and turned them into girl and boy in a world empty of old griefs and pains and full of sunlight.

They discussed without constraint what she needed in the way of clothes, and how to outwit the curiosity of Rhodesia as to her adventure. She told him about her work, and something of her reason why she could not afford to have the truth known. And if his eyes expressed humorous wonder that she should so much mind what the world thought when she was clear of fault, his enthusiasm in plotting ways and means for keeping her doings dark was no less than her own.

"You must just turn up casually at a hotel one day in your cart, and say you've been all right—that you certainly got lost, but found good friends and have been seeing the country and getting 'copy' ever since. Chesterfield says: 'Never lie, but don't tell everything.' Let them think what

they like. They can't prove anything. Roper knows that if he speaks I'll break him to pieces. As for this driver Koos, I can easily square him. He's an old crony of mine."

The sun pressed down on them hard all day, but there were fresh hills on the horizon, and a gold and emerald scape. The crystal air was vibrant with the odours of rolling leagues of vivid flowers growing close to Earth's hot brown body. Wild bees hovered over the brilliant cactus blooms and strange-coloured brittle cups of the sugar-bush, then rose, honey-laden, and softly *burr-red* their way home.

At broad noon, they outspanned by a mule stable on the banks of the Lundi, and made a fire for which Vivienne helped collect sticks. Koos filled the kettle at the river, and Kerry went off on the trail of a little bird that was hopping from tree to tree with an insistent note. It was a honey-bird and its message was clear when Kerry came back carrying two large honey-combs dripping with that golden wine of the veld brewed by the little dark wild bees.

Vivienne thought she had never in her life tasted anything so delicious. Koos was still at the river. She and Kerry sat on two stones, close to each other, and munched the dripping combs, looking

at the great fantastic land about them and sometimes into each other's eyes. She did not know that her youthful beauty had burst through grime and sunburn like a flower from its sheath. He did not know that distance was gone from his eyes again and that they burned dark in his tanned face. But both were aware of the enfolding wings of some great unknown force.

Who drinks Nile water must return to Egypt. Who wears *veld-schoens* will return to the veld; who tastes of Africa's perfumed honey can never again content him with the honey of pallid Europe. Vivienne could not know that by her act she was being initiated into the fellowship of that great band whose hearts will never more be free from the thrilling exquisite pain of Africa's claw. She only knew that some strange taste of strange life went from the honey into her very being and that she had never lived before as she lived in that moment. Life had been waiting for her behind a veil, and now she drew nearer the veil and from behind it came the perfume of stephanotis and cactus bloom and wild honey, the murmuring of rivers, the music of trees. Africa was wild honey, and wild honey was Africa. It had got into her blood. Gone to her brain. Oh, the sweetness of it! The flame of skies and

flowers! Time and space here for dreams! Here the rats and mice of life—malice, intrigue, slander, all the gibbering gnawing things that can make life hell—were absent. Here one pressed one's lips to life and felt the thrill of the kiss swinging up and down every vein in one's body.

Suddenly she gave a cry. A bee's sting had embedded itself in the sensitive flesh of her lower lip, and an exquisite needle-like pain brought tears to her eyes. He saw at once what had happened and sprang up.

"I'll get it out. Hold still a minute."

Touching her face with strong fingers grown extraordinarily delicate, he pinched the lip until he was able to extract the tiny dark sting. She closed her eyes and a tear slipping down her cheek wetted his fingers.

Then he kissed her with the honey and salt wet on her lips, as one might kiss a little crying child. And almost as simply and naturally she kissed him back. When she realised what she had done, her heart seemed to become hollow in the sunlight for one moment, then full, brimming over with some strange wine. She wanted to be furious with him, but looking at his eyes no words would come to her lips. They stood there staring at each other like people in a dream. The sight of Koos

coming back recalled her to herself, the spell under which she had been, broke. Frigid conventional words came to her lips, of the kind she might have spoken in a London drawing-room.

"You forget yourself! . . . How dared you!"

His clear tanned face assumed a deep flush and he turned away abruptly. If she expected an apology she was disappointed. No other word was spoken between them, and when they mounted the coach it was by the driver's side he sat, leaving the whole of the back seat to her.

She found in this something to be thankful for, though her soul resented it. Slowly, with the gold of afternoon and red lights of evening, her anger faded away, but the enchantment of Africa faded too, and she felt cold, cold to the bone.

At the next stopping-place, a young Dutchman was waiting for the coach, and went on with them the following morning. He turned out to be a sprightly fellow from the Eastern Province, anxious to air his views on the subject of Cape politics and ostrich farming. Vivienne earned a reputation for unsociability by retiring under the shadow of a large felt hat she had obtained at the hotel store. But Kerry, who to make way for the stranger had been obliged to return to the back seat, covered her strange manner and appearance by sitting

forward and entering into long arguments. Sometimes both men would lapse into the Boer *taal*, and for frequent spells not a word they said was intelligible to the girl. At such times, Kerry seemed more than a stranger to her. She burned to remember what had passed between them, and shrank away as far as possible into her corner. He appeared to notice nothing. His own manner became curiously heavy, dull as the day went on; a day of torrid heat, air full of thunder and thick with dust. Everyone fell into silence at last, and no sound but the driver's bitter curses and the flack of his whip broke the brooding weariness.

In the late afternoon, a mule fell dead-lame, delaying arrival at Fisher's until past midnight. As she limped from the coach sick with fatigue, Vivienne caught a glimpse by lantern-light of Kerry's face. It was strangely distorted, with eyes bright and bloodshot. The sight of it revolted her, even as his voice speaking the coarse gutteral *taal* had done. But she was too tired to care about anything. Her whole mind had concentrated itself on the thought of bed, and a longing to extend her weary bones in sleep. So that when on the *stoep*, as they waited to be led to their huts, Kerry came near her muttering something indistinguishable, she turned away from him

dully, with eyes and ears only for the woman who was to show the way.

It was not until late the next morning that her mind cleared enough to think. Then her first wonder was why she had not been called to rejoin the coach. After lying still a long time, she remembered the plan that she was to be left at this place, and made haste to dress to find out whether the coach had gone without her. Before her clothes were on, a knock came at the door, and she opened it a crack to the stupid, sad-looking woman of the night before. The following dialogue ensued:

"If you want korfie and grub I'll bring it to you. The big *baas* said you was to have what you wanted."

"Have they gone?"

"Ya. The coach went at six. The big *baas* said you was too sick to go and must rest in bed till he sends for you."

"Very well; bring me something to eat, please."

She got back into bed, and little of her face was showing when the woman returned with food, set it down dully, and departed.

Time and space in which to think, lying there behind the bolted door, battered mud walls about her, bulging thatch overhead full of fat black

spiders that sat immovable as Fate in their lairs. And her thoughts were of the long, long kind, though there was little of youth in them. She was so silent that the flies pretended to believe her dead and descended upon her in black battalions. The struggle to keep them off made the whole business just a little more sordid, and roused in her a kind of sullen fury against Africa and all that in it was.

"I must get out of it," she muttered to herself. "It is driving me mad. I must have been mad to let that man kiss me—a common oaf who talks Dutch in that horrible throaty way—a sort of Boer —how dared he!"

She tried to remember his face as it had revolted her the night before, suffused with blood and swollen, but she could only remember the keen, quiet eyes full of light and distance, and how they had darkened when he looked at her, and how they had measured up Roper, and how her heart had leaped in her breast at the sound of the first blow.

"I am mad," she reiterated wearily, and covered her eyes. "This miserable country has driven me mad!"

At sundown the next day, the woman brought a parcel and the news that a cart had come and would be ready to start again at dawn. The parcel

contained a man's mackintosh, a dark blue coat and skirt of simple not to say skimpy design, a white blouse, and sailor hat. She shook out the Philistine garments carefully as if she thought a scorpion—or a note—might be hidden among them. But no sign of either.

"*Tant mieux!*" she said at last, and discarded the rush hat and tattered shirt almost violently as if with them she hoped to throw off the last trace of her veld madness.

Wrapped in the mackintosh she slipped out to the waiting cart in the dimness of the dawn, and started on the last lap of the journey that was originally to have taken her ten days, but had already extended to six weeks! Only when the lights of Buluwayo gleamed before her at last could she really believe the end had come.

. . . . . .

Within a week, civilisation had its grip on her once more, and she was her cynical self with the nut of bitter dust back in her breast.

The opening up of the country had brought a fashionable English crowd to Buluwayo, among them many people that she knew and had special feuds with. One of the latter was Lady Angela Vinning, a woman with a good figure, beautiful,

pleading green eyes, and thumbs down on every other woman except those who for the moment happened to fit into her schemes. She and Vivienne were staying at the same hotel, and exchanged polite greetings and glances of disdain every morning. Vivienne despised her for what she was: false, unscrupulous, and mean-souled. She detested Vivienne for being fifteen years younger than herself, and that is the most poignant of all the feminine hatreds.

Other grounds for general detestation by her own sex soon made patent to Vivienne were: (1) that Wolfe Montague, the richest man in South Africa, took no pains to hide the fact that his main business in Buluwayo was to be perpetually at her heels; (2) that having been romantically lost on the veld and found again no one quite knew how, she was the most-talked-of person in the country; and (3) that she had turned up looking perfectly radiant, and been seen of none until after regaining possession of her extremely *chic* clothes. Tales with a tang to them were soon flying round Buluwayo. Vivienne assumed her mask and with a calm mien went about her business of "writing up" the country. But behind the mask and the mien she was raging. It was London and the torment of the last few years over again,

only at closer quarters, for here she must share the same hotel with her enemies, run into them daily, and smile and exchange sweet words with them.

"If I could only wipe my boots on them all instead!" she thought savagely, and at such moments almost decided to marry Montague, whose flame grew more and more ardent with the days. But always a shadow slipped between her and her decision—a shadow with grey eyes! Where had those eyes disappeared to? She never saw them, and no one mentioned the name Kerry. The thing puzzled her, yet she was grimly glad. Of what use getting that strange torment of honey and perfume and wild places into her veins again, when she cared only for the call of civilisation, longed only for power and the weapons of wealth with which to smite these little-minded women who thought themselves so clever and fine? She would never be happy until she had power to make others suffer as she had been made to suffer. What had such an ambition to do with the honeyed madness she had known on the banks of the Lundi? Nothing.

One day, writing by the open window of her bedroom, she heard two men talking in the hotel verandah. One was a solicitor whom she had met,

called Cornwall, and a remark of his riveted her attention.

"Brain and Hunt are after it. They'll give five hundred, but de Windt doesn't seem inclined to sell, though he needs money to get up North."

"I'll go a hundred better," said the other man firmly. "It's a good farm and I'd like it myself. Try him with that."

"Right. I'll try him."

Vivienne sat transfixed. The whole story rushed back to her mind and with it the remembrance of her plan to outdo the rogues by buying the farm herself. She had scorned the idea then, and despised herself for harbouring it, but in her present frame of mind it stood up salient and welcome as an old friend. Swiftly she found herself once more considering the question of where to raise the money.

She heard the other man bid Cornwall good-bye with a last injunction to see de Windt at once and make the offer, and a moment or two later she sauntered into the verandah and spoke to the solicitor.

"I heard that man's offer for de Windt's farm, and I want to tell you I'd like to buy it myself. I'll give £800."

Cornwall stared at her, smiling.

"You bitten with the land mania too, Miss Carlton?"

"Yes."

"There's plenty of it about," he remarked tentatively. "And de Windt's not particularly keen on selling."

"It must be *his* farm or none," she said firmly. "I have a particular fancy for the place."

"Oh, well! I'll see what I can do for you. It's a good offer, more than the farm is worth, I think. De Windt's lying ill at present with a bad go of malaria. But I'll put the matter to him and let you know the result."

"Thank you."

She went inside again, and sat on her bed pretending to wonder where the money was to come from. In reality she knew perfectly well, and she didn't care. She was in the dirty business now, up to her eyebrows, for loss or gain. If she gained she would give back Montague his £800 and a wave of the hand. If she lost she must marry him and forever hide the fact that he had been no more than a cat's-paw and a *pis aller*.

"He is too good for me anyway," she reflected. "Any man is too good for me. I've become a scoundrel and an adventuress. Three months of

South Africa have done wonders for me! And I don't care—I don't care!"

She bathed her hot face but could not take the burn from it. It was still brightly flushed, making her look very young and lovely, when she stood before Montague and proffered her abrupt request.

"Will you lend me a thousand pounds for three months?"

Reflection had shown her that she might have to bid higher, or that even if she got it for £800 she would need a margin sum with which to prosecute the search for gold. Further, if she could borrow the money for three months, she might be able to sell and refund to him.

"Of course," said Montague promptly, and could not keep elation out of his eyes. He looked like a large fair bull, was very red and very good-natured, but a hard man at a bargain.

"And will you do something for me?" he asked smiling.

"I cannot attach any conditions," she said quickly. "Mine is entirely a business proposition."

"And mine is, as far at least as I am concerned, pure pleasure. It is only to ask you to wear this little jewel for me." He held out a small morocco

leather case, but she did not put out a hand to receive it. He sighed.

"Say then to wear it for three months. If when we clear up this terribly serious business proposition you wish to return it to me with the thousand, so be it. If you consent to keep it, I can only say—you will make me the happiest man in the world."

Mechanically her hand received the small case, and for a moment his hand closed on hers, and carried it to his lips. She grew a little pale.

"I cannot promise anything," she stammered, drawing her hand away.

"I do not ask you to . . . yet," was his answer, but the ring remained with her, and she knew it was part of the bargain. When she opened the case she was furious with herself, for it was a ring that could not escape note—a great single stone, amber coloured, set in a band of violet enamel.

They were all dining at Government House that night, and she wore it, striving to hide its brilliance amongst a number of other stones, but it glared out yellow and baleful as a tiger's eye. Lady Angela was the first to spot it.

"What a glorious stone! I do so love a yellow diamond. Is it out of the famous Montague

mine, or a mere de Beer's? Journalism must pay, dear Vivvie!"

She gave a little silvery laugh that rippled up Vivienne's spine like an asp, and left a poisoned wound.

Neither did a conversation carried on at her right in full hearing act as an antidote. A Judge of the High Court was telling his dinner neighbour what a charming fellow de Windt was, and how they would all miss him when he pulled out for the North.

"The country can't afford to lose men like that! But they are real lovers of the wild and won't stay when we begin to get too civilised."

"Yet de Windt himself is one of the most civilised fellows I've ever met," said the Administrator. "When all Colonials are like him, Africa will begin to move."

"A Colonial? *Pas possible!*" cried a woman.

"It is possible though. He was born out here and spite of Harrow and Oxford and a place at the Bar, Africa has him in her maw for good."

"The dear fellow would have been here to-night, if he had not been so ill," said the hostess. And the wretched Vivienne was thankful she had been spared that ordeal at least. But she held fast to her plan. What matter whether de Windt were

a splendid fellow or not? Since he loved the wild, all the better for him—he wouldn't miss his gold mine! She felt herself growing harder and harder every moment.

"Millionaires must be made of tough stuff," she thought sardonically. "Fine fellows! I expect I shall begin to look like one soon. Eyes like flint with pouches under them, and a tiger trap for a mouth! *Zut, alors!*"

Thanks to Lady Angela the news was all over Buluwayo the next day that she was wearing Montague's ring. Even the fact that Cornwall came bearing propitious tidings did little to quench Vivienne's rage.

"It's all right," he said. "De Windt will take your offer. The other people are keen as mustard and want to go higher, but he says he wouldn't sell to them at any price."

"I want it fixed up at once," she said feverishly.

"As soon as you like. He asked me to hustle it along too, in case you changed your mind. The poor fellow has had a bad go of fever, but the news quite cheered him up, and he'll be about in a day or two. He seems greatly pleased at your wanting the place."

Vivienne was assailed by a choking sensation, and a bitter flavour came into her mouth, but she

knew that as a prospective millionaire she must get accustomed to such discomforts. They were part of the training. As also was the skilful fencing she began to practise on the unsuspecting Montague. Certainly it was a case of Greek meeting Greek, but sometimes it seemed to her more like a duel between a sucking dove and a serpent. And she was not the dove. A London journalist had once said to her that he believed all women were natural-born crooks, and now she began to believe it.

"The black drop was in me all the time," she thought bitterly. "But it has taken Africa to bring it out!"

Although the negotiations for the sale went forward apace, they were not pushed on fast enough to please her, and she almost worried Cornwall out of his wits in her determination to have the thing signed and sealed before de Windt was well enough to get about. She did not yet feel quite hardened enough in the ways of millionaires to be able to face over a deed of sale the man whose gold she was stealing.

Another miserable part of the transaction was the receiving of Wolfe Montague's cheque. That was a bad moment. The paper burnt her hand like flame. But she examined it carefully, and

pulled Montague up sharply when she found that it was drawn on a local Bank.

"That would never do," she said firmly. "I cannot have my affairs all over Buluwayo."

"I thought you wanted it for immediate use," he replied suavely, "and Banks don't talk."

"I wouldn't trust them," she averred; "I give my confidence to few." But she smiled her confidence in him at least with such lovely eyes that he went away with content in his heart to arrange the matter on such lines as only millionaires can command. Forty-eight hours later the money was to hand by cabled draft from London on the Standard Bank, Buluwayo.

The same morning Vivienne went for the first time to look at the farm. Montague's carriage was at her disposal as usual, and by the aid of a small local map she was able to direct the groom. They calculated that the distance there and back could be easily covered in a couple of hours, and that she could get back in plenty of time to prepare for a ball which the magistrate was giving that night in the Court House.

The farm lay out towards the Matopos, along a dusty, sun-baked road, but Vivienne, well shaded in the luxuriously cushioned body of the carriage noticed neither dust nor heat. The excitement

of the gamble for money was in her veins, and she was telling herself how good a substitute it made for happiness. The flickering glance of envious hatred Lady Angela had shot at her from under a white umbrella on the sidewalk was part of the game that she was in now, up to her nostrils—the game which, though the weapons were sheathed in silk and the blows prepared behind honeyed smiles, was just the same old sweet game, governed by the same old sweet law, that was in the beginning and shall be in the end—the law of Club and Fang!

"What is the use of pretending I am too good for it, and was made for better things?" she meditated, and her smile took the little bitter twist that was now becoming habitual. With it still on her lips, she looked over the side of the carriage into a pair of grey eyes full of veld light and far places. A dog-cart containing two men had passed and gone, but not too soon for her to recognise Kerry and see an answering flash of recognition in his eyes.

Gone too her satisfaction, such as it was, in the gamble and the game. Fever died out of her veins and her heart lay cold as a stone. She looked not a girl, but a pale tired woman of thirty when she stepped out of the carriage and climbed over

the little sloping kopjes that gave a view of the six thousand acres that would some day be a famous gold mine. Silent, lovely acres they were, full of colour and peace. Low-spreading trees standing alone, scattered purple rocks on which lay patches of rust red as blood, a carpet of wild grasses and little star-shaped veld flowers. Here and there great boulders were pitched together with enough earth to harbour a spiking tree and trailing creepers. Some lines of red gum had been planted and in their shadow stood a little thatched hut, before whose door, its slender branches tapping the thatch, grew a little tree of the laburnum class, laden with clustering golden bloom that gave a lovely scent.

A sudden poignant regret, stronger than herself, rushed through her, that the peace of these brooding acres of loneliness should be destroyed by what lay hidden under them. In imagination, she saw the dirt and débris of a new gold diggings, the purple rocks shattered by dynamite, trees and flowers torn out and lying dead, the little perky sand-blooms trodden down. All for gold to poison the hearts of men and buy the souls of women as hers had been poisoned, bought!

Was it too late now to repent, and instead of digging out the gold keep the land as it was, silent

and peaceful? Go and live in that little thatched hut with the tree by the door? She dreamed with the thought a moment then turned bitterly away. The land was not even hers unless she could pay for it with the gold that came out of it! It was Montague's as *she* was Montague's until she repaid the thousand pounds. She must go back to the scheme of avarice and duplicity she had entered into with eyes open and heart greedy for power and revenge. Her path was clear before her. It had nothing to do with peace and beauty and nothing in it that was noble, but it was her path. As she got back into the carriage and drove away, she knew that the memory of that place would haunt her all her days.

"Another restless ghost to walk the weary corridors of memory!" she said to herself.

Cornwall banished it for a while with the business of signing the transfer deed, but at the dance given by the magistrate that night it returned. A pair of eyes looking at her across space and gems and jewels, as once she had seen them stare across the veld, brought back the ghost and made it seem a very alive thing. She had never seen Kerry in the evening dress of convention before, and tried to feel astonished that he should resemble a distinguished man of the world rather than a sort

of Boer. Inexplicably, as she stared, she forgot everything except to notice how worn and ill he looked. Over the shoulder of her partner, she met his clear gaze, and it became curiously and inextricably mixed in her memory with the lovely peace of the land she had visited that day. It was hot for dancing, and most people were beginning to meander out of doors and stay there.

"I want to introduce to you a great pal of mine —Kerry de Windt," said her partner, Marshall Brunton, who was also her host the magistrate. "May I?"

"Kerry de Windt?" she answered slowly.

"A splendid chap. He's here to-night, after a bad go of fever and pneumonia he got somehow on his way up-country."

"On his way up-country?" she repeated mechanically.

"It appears that he was coming up by coach but left it at Palapye to go off on a hunt for a little child that was lost from some waggons. Everyone had given up the search, but he found the child away in a wild krantz, starving, with an old mad Bechuana boy."

"Was it's mother alive?" Vivienne had a sickening vision of that poor mother sitting, hat in hand, outside her hut.

"He got back just in time to save her reason. Queer fellow! We'd never have known anything about it from *him*, of course. The story came up by wire from Palapye."

"Is that he talking to Lady Angela Vinning?"

"Yes. Shall we go over?"

"No. Take me out into the air please," she faltered. Her face was white as death. So *he* it was whom she had robbed! Kerry de Windt! The man who had not only saved the child's life, but herself, from God knew what worse horrors than death!

It was out in one of the verandahs, dimly lit by Japanese lanterns, that he was brought and introduced to her.

"You two should find plenty to talk about, as you both know all about being lost on the veld," said the host gaily, and hurried away to other duties.

They stood looking at each other. She wanted to cry out something, but she did not know what it was. His face was very haggard with an irony she had never known about his mouth. In the end, all her stiff lips found to say was:

"I am glad you are better of your illness."

"Thank you. I have something on which to congratulate you also, it seems." The flavour of irony was on his tongue as well as on his lips.

"I did not know it was your land," she stammered, and he stared a moment.

"Oh, *that*," he said carelessly. "You're welcome. It's not the loss of that I mind."

There was a silence. They had sat down in a dim corner. At last her voice came faintly.

"What then have you lost?" She hid her hand on which shone the yellow diamond.

"Something I shall get along very well without in future, I dare say—faith in women."

She couldn't bear the bitterness of his tone and words. They hurt more than if he had taken a knife to her. Yet a miserable pride and wrath made her pursue the subject to the last fence.

"You speak as though it is some fault other than your own?"

"*You* know whose fault it is—whose hands have robbed me," he said fiercely; "whose lips have given to another what once they gave to me."

"Never, never!" The words broke involuntarily from her lips, though what it was she denied so furiously was not quite clear at first.

"You will not deny that for a few moments at least, I had a right to believe that you gave them to me? You kissed me back that morning."

She said no word at that, only put up her hand

to her eyes for a moment as though to shut out something. The gesture brought into sight the yellow diamond, and with a finger he scornfully indicated it.

"Is not that a symbol of what I have lost—and another gained?"

Even as he spoke the large shadow bore down on them of Montague come to expostulate concerning a sit-out dance that was booked to him. Vivienne's voice, low, but very clear and cold, cut short his plainings.

"This ring is merely the symbol of a business arrangement between myself and Mr. Montague. He very kindly lent me a sum of money with which to make a good speculation. I went to him in preference to applying to a money-lender, and in honour of my confidence in him he asked me to wear this charming stone. When I return the money in three months' time or less, I also return the ring. Is not that exactly how the matter stands, Mr. Montague?"

"I believe it is," responded Montague with exceeding dryness, and looking anything but amiable. The unexpectedness of the attack took the wind out of his sails. He would have had more pleasure in bombshelling de Windt than making any statement of the kind.

"That is all then, thank you," said Vivienne calmly. "I shall have finished my talk with Mr. de Windt in about five minutes' time."

Millionaires in South Africa are not accustomed to such treatment, and if Montague had been followed he might have been heard to mutter in his wrath that she could finish her conversation with de Windt in Hades if she liked. The principal fact, as far as Vivienne was concerned, was that he departed. De Windt too had risen, his haggard face grown very dark.

"Evidently there is nothing further for me to do but apologise, and get out. Your highly interesting conversation with Montague has made that clear, at least."

"Do you mean to be insolent?" she asked slowly.

"I hope not," he said with steady scorn; "only to reassure myself that your arrangements and speculations never have been and never can be any concern of mine."

"That is not quite correct. The speculation referred to had to do directly with you. The money I borrowed was to buy your farm."

"Indeed! Well, in that matter at least I have reason to congratulate you. It is going to turn out a good spec."

"Ah! and how is that?" she peered at him curiously.

"The land has a rich gold reef running through it. You will in all probability be able to re-sell for several hundred thousand pounds."

"And when did you know this wonderful thing?" she asked in a strange voice.

"After I'd sent word to you by Cornwall that I'd sell. Brain, the first bidder, came and confessed that he and his partner knew about the gold and had meant to "do" me. His idea, of course, was that I should pay him for the information by going shares and not letting you have the land."

Vivienne's heart stood very still.

"By the way, I was driving back from his place when I met you this morning. We'd been inspecting the specimens his partner had prospected. Cornwall has instructions to hand them over to you in the morning. They are unmistakable."

"And in spite of all this you still sold to me?"

"My bond was given," he said curtly.

She had risen too, and they were facing each other—about them all the chirping night things—peace everywhere except in their hearts. Music came faintly stealing from the dancing-room.

"So after all Africa has brought you luck," he said.

She trembled under the contempt his tone betrayed for that luck, but something in her that wished to live would not be daunted by his scorn. And that something spoke in spite of her, in a gentle, alluring voice.

"Do you think it is such great luck? Can you from your heart wish me no better?"

"The luck I would wish you entails advice you would never take."

"Try me," her voice was very low and sweet, with a broken note in it. "Try me—Kerry."

He looked at her sombrely. His face seemed to have grown more haggard. At last he said:

"If you lived in the wilds awhile, under happier circumstances than those you have come through, the real woman in you might have a chance to live . . . you would come to realise how rotten they are, all these *lucky* things you set such store by."

"Perhaps I know that"; the strong unfaltering force still had hold of her and used her voice. "Perhaps it is the wilds I am hungering for—and the strange happiness of a morning on the banks of the Lundi—" Her voice was almost a whisper. He had to draw nearer to hear it, and stayed staring with a fierce moodiness into her eyes.

"Do you mean?—Vivienne?"

"I think you know what I mean." She lifted her lips to him, to take or leave, and knew that if he left them they would go lonely all life long, which was no more than she deserved who had played fast and loose with love. But he did not leave them. Once more she tasted the strange fragrant flavour of wild honey, and knew at last that this fantastic land of strange flowers and heavy scents, of silence and song, cruelty and beauty, was for her, as he was for her. Africa was wild honey. The love of Kerry de Windt was wild honey, and she could never content herself with any other. It was good to be safe in her own place against his heart. Good to have about her the arms that would never let her go back to a world which ate her heart and made her perform acts that besmirched her soul. But there was still that to tell which might loosen his arms and send them empty away. She held them tight, tight about her while she told him the ugly story.

For a moment there had sprung up in her an almost overwhelming temptation to hide the truth from him (he would never know unless she told him, how she had taken advantage of stolen information to plot against and rob him of his land and gold. No one even guessed the truth).

But the next moment she had torn out that temptation, and thrust it away, ashamed.

"How base I must be if even love cannot purify me!" she cried. "But it shall—it *has*. Listen Kerry."

In the end, he kissed the tears from her lips as once before he had kissed them. One more of the little crystal globes of illusion men have about the women they love went smash perhaps, but he hid the pieces from her bravely enough. Only, he held her a little closer, and there were no half measures about his conditions.

"You've got to give it all up and come with me—away up North—anywhere I go—and not care where you're going to—and never look back—nor care if you ever come back. Is that understood? We shall be poor—but by God! we'll get something out of life that those who live in towns and cities can't buy with all their gold."

"But your farm, Kerry?—the land that is rightly yours?"

"We couldn't touch it after all this buying and selling with borrowed money, Vivienne. Rightly or wrongly it is Montague's if he wants it—and you bet he will want it—he must get it, together with the ring and that other two hundred pounds."

"I shall have robbed you then after all?" she said sadly.

"No, only paid for our happiness. Everything has to be paid for, dear. We are lucky if we can pay with anything so cheap as money! Do you care?"

"No, no, if you do not. I care for nothing except to be sure that I can repay you for all I——"

He kissed away the rest with kisses that were as fierce and tender and cruel as Africa herself. "Oh! yes, you can repay me, be very sure of that. But it must be now. *Now!* You must come with me this very night."

"To-night?" she faltered, trembling a little.

"Yes, to-night. I'm never going to let you go again. Brunton has the power to marry us, and I know he will do it after these people are all gone, if I put the case to him. My waggons are lying all ready a few miles from here. They've been ready for days, waiting for me to be well enough to start. Will you come?"

She thought for an instant of what the world would say, the big world across the sea, and this little portion of it in Buluwayo; the mocking smiles and innuendoes of the women, the men's amazement—but only for an instant, then found

herself smiling; that side of life was finished with now, a higher, fuller life waiting for her.

"Yes, Kerry," she said simply, "I will follow you to the end of the world and the end of life."

De Windt was no man of half actions. Within half an hour, Brunton had been beguiled into consent and Mrs. Brunton let into the secret. A long residence had bestowed upon the latter a taste for romance and a heart prepared for anything in the shape of adventure that came along. She threw herself rapturously into the preparations for an after-midnight marriage, and sent her own maid for enough things from Vivienne's hotel to make up a hasty travelling trousseau; the remaining luggage was to be sent for the next day. One or two very favoured guests being intimate friends of de Windt's were let into the secret and allowed to stay, the rest went home all unsuspecting and never knew the news until next morning.

The amazing thing was that Montague was one of those who stayed. Vivienne had accomplished a short interview with him, and returned him those things which were his with a brief *résumé* of the situation. To do him justice, he took it like a man, as well he might,when he was like to come out of the affair richer by several hundreds of

thousands. For de Windt would accept no other solution of the money tangle than that Montague take possession of the farm and all its treasures. In return, he accepted the loan of Montague's carriage in which to carry Vivienne away to her new life.

In one of the small, sweet, exquisitely fresh hours before dawn they were set down and left alone on the wide and empty veld. The dusty road along which they had come was beautified by wraith-like rays from a passing moon. Purple rocks had put on a silvery sheen. The white radiant stars burned like jewels in the blue veil of heaven. Far hills and shadowy trees rose silent and salient against the sky. The spot where the waggons lay outspanned was close to de Windt's old farm, in the same area of brooding peace Vivienne had visited the day before—but with how different a mood! Then, Life had tasted bitterer between her lips than the aloes of Death. Now, her heart was clean of guile as a white rose, and she was a red and glowing rose whose fragrance intoxicated them both with the divine madness of love. Old Africa took them to her breast and they became part of her.

Common or Garden Earth

Common or Garden Earth

THERE always seems to be more ardour and vitality in blue-eyed people than in others, and Diane Heywood and Maryon Hammond were both blue-eyed—with a difference. His were blue as the inner light of a glacier, with something of the ice's quality in their steady stare—a fighter's eyes, hard as a rock that you cannot break with an axe; the kind of eyes that women forgive anything to. Indeed Hammond had spent most of his thirty-eight years sinning against women, and they forgave him even unto seventy times seven; and that was as far as the Holy Scriptures entered into the matter. Like Napoleon he was a little fellow when it came to measurements, but so alert, high-headed, and graceful that no one would have guessed him to be something under five-foot eight, and he had the swiftest, most silent feet in Africa, whether for dancing, running, leaping, tracking a lion, or kicking a nigger. A copper complexion bestowed upon him by the land he loved, and a small tan-coloured

moustache above a somewhat traplike mouth made up the rest of his equipment. It may be gathered that he was no beauty; but he was "the captain of his soul," such at it was, and he carried himself as though the gods had elected him to be one of the eternal captains of the earth.

Diane Heywood's eyes were long and deep and cool with shadows in them like the shadows under far hills on a hot day, and that should have been enough for any woman; but the gods had been good to her and added a slim little nose that grew straight out of her forehead like a Greek woman's, dragging her upper lip so high that there seemed nothing of it except a red curve above another red curve and a short firm chin with a cleft in it. It was hard to tell what in all these soft curves and dimples should suggest a pride of spirit almost insolent, a scorn of all things that were not high and clear and noble. It might have been something in the tilt of her head, the turn of her mouth, or the unflickering character of the shadows in her eyes; but whatever or wherever its origin it was there for all men to read, and not the least of her attractions when read; for all men, whether they know it or not, love that quality of pride in women, recognising, dimly or clearly according to their natures, that on it is based

all fine and great things in the generation to come.

However, if instead of possessing the beauty of a May Day Miss Heywood had been the dullest and plainest of girls she would still have enjoyed, for a time at least, the rather enchanting experience of having all the men in Fort Salisbury buzzing about her like bees round a rose on a June morning, and every woman hanging on her lips as if she were the Oracle of Thebes. For she had come straight from England and the charm of "home" still hung about her even as the colour of "home" stayed in her cheeks. She had seen fields —little square fields with hedges growing round them, and buttercups growing in them—plucked blackberries and cowslips, ridden to hounds in the Black Vale; heard the jingle of hansom bells, and 'busses rumbling on asphalt, and the boom of Big Ben; tasted London fog, smelt the Thames; seen Charles the First riding down Whitehall, and Nelson's cocked hat lost in the mist. She, the latest comer, had seen and done and heard all or any of these dear and desirable things later than any of the homesick exiles in Salisbury; therefore was she most dear and desirable beyond all things that be.

"She was London, she was Torment, she was Town."

There were in Rhodesia women whom men loved or reverenced or tolerated or disliked or desired as the case might be, but, for the time being, one and all of these were neglected and forgotten for the society of "the girl from home."

Five men were on the verge of proposing to her —one of whom by the way was already engaged— when suddenly Maryon Hammond with his dog Boston at his heels dropped up from his mining camp out beyond Mazoë. And when "Marie" Hammond set his gay, bad eyes on a woman's face, and his feet on the path that led to that woman's heart, the other men were just wise enough to drop out of the running and pretend they didn't mind.

Like all great passions, it did not take long to come to a head—only a few afternoon rides across the short springy veld grass, a few moonlit evenings with music in the house and loungers in the verandahs, a supper or two up in the old Kopje Fort, and then the ball got up by Hammond and his cronies at the club.

When, after the fifth waltz, Diane Heywood came into the ballroom from the dim verandah where she had been sitting-out a dance with Maryon Hammond, her eyes were like two violets that had been plucked at dawn with the mists of

the night still on them. She had the lovely dewy look of a girl who has been kissed in the darkness by the man she loves; a girl whose heart has waked up and found itself beating in a woman's breast.

They had known each other only a week, but it was plain to see what had come to them. She wore the news in her parted lips, her tinted cheeks, and the little rumple of her hair. He walked as one whom the gods had chosen to honour, pride-of-life written across his face, yet in his eyes a humility curious in Maryon Hammond. He had met his Waterloo.

Some of the women gave little sighs, not in envy so much as in a kind of sadness that certain beautiful things only come once in each woman's life, however much she may try and repeat or give base imitations of them; and most men felt a sort of warmth in their veins as they looked at those two radiant beings. But a number of people merely contented themselves with feeling extremely glad that the career of Maryon Hammond as a pirate in love was at an end.

For it must here be admitted that the spectacle of a woman holding out her soul in both hands for Maryon Hammond to play with, or walk over, or throw into the fires that burn and consume not,

was not an altogether novel one to some at least of those present; it had been witnessed before in various parts of Africa—and the entertainment, it may be mentioned, is not a pretty one when the man concerned is not worrying particularly about souls. People said that Marie Hammond took toll of women's souls for something a woman had once done to his own, long ago in his own country America; but none knew the rights of the story.

Then there was his friendship with the beautiful Cara de Rivas. No one had been quite sure how far, if at all, her soul had entered into that matter; but it was certain that tongues had been set a-wagging, for Maryon Hammond's friendship was a dangerous if fascinating thing for a woman to possess, unless she happened to be the woman he was going to marry. And Cara de Rivas was already married. That was the trouble. For Nick de Rivas, a big, handsome, if slightly morose fellow was plainly something less than sympathetic with his wife's mid-summer madness; even though, until Hammond called his attention to the matter, he had appeared to be blind and indifferent to the fact that he had a pretty and charming wife.

There had been considerable relief felt when de Rivas in spite of his home and large mining inter-

ests being in Mashonaland suddenly decided to take his wife away on a trip to England.

"And no bones broken," sighed Rhodesians, though they sought in vain for confirmation of that or any other legend] in the stony stare of Maryon Hammond. They were a romantic people those Rhodesians in the far-off days of 1896, with no rooted objection to illegal adventure, but though Hammond was neither good nor beautiful he had endeared himself to the country in many ways and everyone was glad to think that his stormy career was likely to come to an end in the peaceful harbour of marriage instead of in some more tragic fashion. And no one could help rejoicing that Fate had arranged for the advent of Jack Heywood's sister while the de Rivas were still away, and that the whole affair was likely to be fixed up before the de Rivas' return which, by the way, after the lapse of nearly a year had already been signalled.

The Hammond-Heywood engagement then, was announced about two weeks after the ball at the Club, though everyone knew perfectly well that it had been signed and sealed, so to speak, on that night, the extra two weeks being thrown in as a concession to conventionality and a sort of bonus to the men who had been about to propose.

Besides Miss Heywood had a family in England whom it was Hammond's business to consult and beguile, and consultations and beguilements take time as well as money when they have to be conducted by cable. In the meantime, it was plain to see that Love had found Maryon Hammond at last, and that he was loved openly and gladly back. It was for all the world to see—as patent as the silver stars on a purple African night. He would walk rough-shod over everybody in a drawing-room or cricket-field or polo-ground to reach her side, and she would openly and obviously forget everybody else in the place and in the world when he was there. No matter how big or how curious the crowd these two were alone in it when they were together. People said that it must have been a strange, almost piquant, sensation to Hammond so expert in secret intrigue, so versed in the dissimulation and duplicity of illegal adventure, to be at last conducting a love affair in the open, reckless of the eyes of men, and the tongues of women, because for once the woman in the case had nothing to fear! Be that as it may, a passion so fine and frank and careless had never before been seen in a land where great passions are not rare, and Salisbury genuflected before it in all reverence and admiration.

It was at this propitious juncture that the de Rivas elected to return. Their home was not in Salisbury but about seventy miles off, out Mazoë way too, and incidentally not above ten miles from Hammond's own camp, but they put up at a hotel in town for a week or two to give Mrs. de Rivas time to recover from the fatigue of a long coach journey, and be welcomed back by old friends. Promptly all the women in the town went to call, and take the news of the Hammond-Heywood engagement.

The Spanish Inquisition is no more, but the gentle art of putting the question accompanied by the watching torture has not yet been lost. Even when malice is absent, who can eradicate curiosity from the feminine temperament? Cara de Rivas' dearest and most intimate Inquisitors were tender for her, however. They considered it only human that they should desire to know how she was "taking it," but they had no coarse intent of putting questions. Merely they hoped to extract a few answers—eyes and lips and incidentally clothes tell so much!

And behold! two of the answers were entirely unexpected.

The first was that Cara de Rivas was as deeply in love with her husband as he was plainly and

profoundly in love with her. This was for all the world to see and all the world proclaimed it instantly; but the other and charming piece of news was more subtly distributed. Women conveyed it by means of their eyebrows, with benign little smiles, and cryptic remarks, such as that—"It was all for the best"; "It would make such a bond"; "No more dangerous friendships"; "*It* would help the poor thing to forget (if there was anything to forget)!"

Afterwards, all wise people let the story of "the dangerous friendship" die and be buried, as all things that are dead as nails ought to be buried and put out of sight. And no one but a few scandal-lovers talked of anything but the speedily approaching marriage. The men of Salisbury made Bernard Carr's life a torment to him, accusing him of being busier than a hen with a tin chicken getting Maryon Hammond's trousseau ready, while they went into the matter of that same trousseau with profane and particular detail. For Carr was Jonathan to Maryon Hammond's David, and his love for his friend was outrageous and notorious, passing all bounds. Like the mother of Asa he had made an idol in a grove; and the name of the idol was Hammond. The other friend and partner of Maryon Hammond

was Girder, a dry, lean fellow of cynical disposition, professing affection for neither man, woman, nor dog; but throughout the long sun-smitten days and rain-soaked nights of that wet, hot January, he was the only man who refrained from joining in the general ribaldry at Carr's expense, just because Carr, the perfect friend, neglected his own affairs to put Hammond's in order, so that the latter might in due time marry and leave the country. While Hammond, gay of heart and wonderfully brilliant of face considering he had no looks, irreproachable always in white duck riding-kit—*grande tenue* for Salisbury—idled away the sunlit, starlit hours with the moon of his desire that knew no wane.

Strange that the affair of Maryon Hammond's trousseau should occupy the minds and tongues of his friends far more than the threatened rising of the natives! But that was ever the way of Rhodesians in '96. "Take care of the affairs of your neighbour," ran their motto, "and the affairs of the country will take care of themselves." Besides, the natives had threatened so often; it was absurd to be disturbed about them.

The growing restlessness and insolence of the Mashona tribes kraaled in the Salisbury, Mazoë, and Lomagundi districts—that is, within a sixty-

mile radius of the capital was in fact notorious, and many of the outlying farmers and miners professed uneasiness; but the Native Commissioners whose business it was to know such things scoffed at their fears. The notion of a rebellion amongst a tribe of people long down-trodden and brow-beaten by the fierce Matabele, and now for the first time enjoying properous and unharried life under the white man's rule found the Commissioners sneering incredulously.

"Makalikas show fight!" scoffed Brebner, Head of the Native Department and terror of every black face from Vryberg to Blantire. "Great Lord of War! There is not one 'liver' among the whole fifty thousand of them. But of course they're cheeky—all niggers are when they get fat, and it takes only one good season with the crops for that. Moreover you must remember that it is now about six years since the Matabele knocked annual spots off them, and they are beginning to forget who it was stopped that by smashing the Matabele. Therefore they are cheeky, also inclined to think they are great. But you give me ten men and three Cape 'boys' and I'll settle the hash of any ten thousand of them in this blessed country."

This last to the Administrator for whose permission he was nagging to go and "remonstrate" with the ringleaders of a tribal fight down Victoria way. The Administrator smiled at the word. He was aware that Brebner invariably "remonstrated" with a riding-whip, but being a wise man and one who had lived a great part of his life amongst natives he was also aware that Brebner's mode of argument was the best and only one properly appreciated by "our poor black brothers in South Africa" as they are fancifully described at Exeter Hall.

So, eventually, Brebner and suite were allowed to depart upon their hash-settling expedition. They rode out one pink dawn and the veld swallowed them up; thereafter peace fell upon Salisbury, and all talk of a native rising was dismissed. The discussion on Hammond's trousseau was resumed at the Club.

Only Hammond himself did not think it good enough to stay on with his bride in a country which seemed to him unsettled and breathing of war, and he did not hesitate to state his intentions in spite of jeers.

"Why, hello, Marie!" they mocked him at the Club, and quoted remarks from the Gadsbys:

"White hands cling to the bridle rein!"

. . . . . .

"You may carve it on his tombstone, you may cut it on his card,
That a young man married is a young man marred," etc.

"*That's* all right," laughed Hammond serenely. "But I'll take a year off for my honeymoon just the same, and you fellows can put things straight with the niggers. Afterwards, I'll come back and congratulate you and bring up the new machinery for the Carissima."

The Carissima Gold Mine belonged to Hammond and Carr and Girder, and looked like panning out wealth untold in the near future.

"Oh, you're crazy, Marie," said Billy Blake, Head of the Mounted Police, striving to be patient with the renegade. "Love has gone to your head. There isn't going to be any row with the natives. Compose yourself, my son."

Hammond composed himself as requested in a large lounge chair, his feet on another. Leisurely, and with obvious enjoyment of his pipe he explained that in *his* opinion Love and War were each good and great and highly desirable things, but he preferred them separate.

"They don't mix," said he; "so we'll divide

them this time. You can have the war all to yourself, Blake, and I'll—" he flushed under his copper skin and added gravely, for he made and took no jests on the subject of his amazing happiness, "It's a long time since I've seen Kentucky —I'll take a trip home."

"Oh, you ought to take medicine, Marie——"

"Take a rest——"

"Take a drink——"

"Man, I tell you——"

"Show me the chief of these tin-pot Makalikas who has got the gall to fight——"

"Why, you've got nerve to clear out——"

They clamoured and jeered about him, but he remained cool. His personal courage was too well known for there to be any doubt of it. He had more than earned his laurels as the most daring of scouts in the Matabele trouble of '93, and many another "little war," and could afford, if so inclined, to trim himself from top to toe with white feathers without likelihood of being misunderstood. So he left them to wrangle it out among themselves, and it being after dinner and a whole three hours and a half since he last saw Diane, he went to call on her at the house of Mrs. Tony Greville, and Boston, as usual, slouched beside him.

Now Boston as a dog and a gentleman deserves a few words to himself. He was a large, dust-coloured bull-terrier whom Hammond had raised from puppyhood, and in whose muscular carcass the man had by rigid training developed many of his own physical characteristics—that is to say, though Boston was of large ungainly build and always appeared to flounder rather than to walk, he was really as speedy as a greyhound, brave as a lion, and silent in his movements as Fate herself. He could track down anything, and scout with the best man in the country (who happened to be his master), but he spent most of his time tracking that same master; for it was one of the practical jokes and never-failing joys of Salisbury to hide Hammond from his dog. Boston would go through fire and water to regain his love—even the great Ice Barrier wouldn't have stopped him long—but the moment he had Hammond in sight he would assume an air of cynical indifference, and with his hands in his pockets, so to speak, lounge up and sling himself down with a weary air as though he'd given up all idea of finding what he was searching for,—certainly not Hammond at all! As for Hammond, he loved his dog as he loved few men; it is doubtful whether, if asked to choose between Boston and

his best friend for company in exile, he would have chosen the man.

Knowing full well for what destination his master was now bound, Boston presently went ahead, and before Hammond had reached the house of Tony Greville, where Miss Heywood was staying because Tony Greville was Jack Heywood's best friend, Boston had returned to report that Miss Heywood was not in her usual place in the verandah. Neither was she in the drawing-room; and search by the servants found her absent also from her bedroom. It was only when Boston set his blunt nose towards the Gymkhana Ground that Mrs. Greville remembered to have seen Diane strolling off in that direction directly after dinner.

"She's not quite herself this evening, I think, Marie. There were a lot of women here when she got in from her ride with you, and I fancy she overheard something she didn't like. That wretched little gossip Mrs. Skeffington Smythe was here."

Mrs. Greville looked a little anxiously into his face, and the hard, blue eyes looked back unflinchingly, but as he walked swiftly in the direction of the Gym Ground, alone and with his mask off, his face showed signs of strain.

The night under a rising moon was clear as crystal, and he had no difficulty in descrying Diane's figure across the course where he and she since their engagement was announced (escaping for a little while from an army of friends) often walked in the evenings. Some of their dearest moments had been passed sitting where she now sat on the pile of heavy timber by the Grand Stand.

Boston, arrived before his master, sprawled at Diane's feet, and she was gazing before her at the moonlight coming up in waves from the horizon, flooding all the land with cold silver light. Something colder than the moonlight gripped the man's heart for a moment, but he held out his hands to her and spoke her name as though he had nothing to fear. She stood up quickly and put out her hands too—but with a difference; in her gesture there was a subtle suggestion of defence, of warding off something—and when he would have taken them in his, she drew back.

"No, Marie—not yet—there is something you must tell me——"

He stared at her. She was deadly pale, but the moon itself was not more composed, and her eyes had the same steady glance as his own. Her question was spoken in a very low voice.

"Were you ever in love with—another man's wife?"

His face darkened. Prepared as he was, the unexpected form of her question took him unawares. He had anticipated something to which he could give a firm, clear denial—but to this, what could he say, who had so much on his conscience!

"*You* . . . listening to scandal, Diane!" he said at last, and the reproach in his voice reached home. She faltered a moment, not answering at once, and they stood looking at each other, less like lovers than two duellists measuring each other's strength.

"I will believe anything you tell me, Marie," she said gently, at last; "I ask nothing better than to hear that it is only scandal."

He could not afford to hesitate any longer.

"If you are referring to my friendship with Mrs. de Rivas, I may say that in *that* at least I am innocent. Her husband neglected her; I was sorry for her; our so-called friendship was a concerted plan to bring him to his senses, and it worked like magic. They are now extremely happy."

But he had waked something new in Diane Heywood; she looked into his eyes with the cold curiosity of a child.

"Why should your friendship be so terrible a thing for a woman? Why should it bring a man to his senses?"

"Oh, dearest! for God's sake, don't ask questions the answers to which will only hurt you?"

"But I must know, Maryon," she said proudly. "I have never lived amongst lies and shadows. Everything must be clear and clean about me. If you are innocent in this matter—of what is it then that you are guilty?"

The mad longing of the unshriven soul for confession swept over him then. He too would have all clear and clean about him, for once and all, cost what it might.

"Oh, just of being a blackguard," he said, and all the pent-up bitterness, and self-mockery and self-loathing of years came out in the low-spoken words. "Just of being a scoundrel and a coward as far as women are concerned—of robbing, looting—taking all and giving nothing in return—playing pirate and cut-throat in the great game of love, careless of what anyone suffered."

"*You!*" she whispered. "*You* whom I have looked upon as a knight of chivalry—a Galahad—all that was fine and noble!"

"Oh! Diane, I have never pretended to be any of these things—never wanted you to believe

it—I am only common earth—common or garden earth. But such as I am, I love you—I ask you to take me with all my sins."

There was a long silence.

"But *why*, Maryon?— What changed you from the man God meant you to be, to *this?*"

She loved him. For all her wounded pride and anger and horror, for all his black sins, she loved him, as women will love through everything, in spite of everything; and she longed for some word of extenuation that would justify the forgiveness she could not withhold.

"I loved a woman years ago, and she was faithless. She left me for another man. My wife ran away with my best friend."

"Your *wife ?*"

"Yes. Oh, I meant to tell you everything before you married me, Diane—only, I was putting it off as long as possible. I left America because of that, and came out to this country. Then, one day, after many years, I found myself up here living next door to the very man and woman who had been false to me—for whose sake I had been divorced in America so that they might marry and be happy."

"*Divorced ?*"

"And they weren't happy after all. She loved

him but he was neglecting her, and she turned to me again for help. I found a kind of cynical amusement in helping her out. So there you have the whole story, Diane—not a pretty one, God knows, but, in this instance, not a guilty one so far as I am concerned."

But the girl stood stammering at him, one word on her lips. "*Divorced?*"

"You must believe that I meant to conceal nothing from you, Diane. I have already spoken to de Rivas and his wife and told them that you must know—though no one else need ever suspect. And if you choose it, if you will still take me in spite of my sins—and, darling, I believe you will, we'll get out of this country and go back to my own——"

"But, Maryon," she broke in, despairingly, "you do not seem to understand that this ends everything between us. I am a Catholic—do you not realise——?"

"A Catholic? I don't care what you are——"

"But don't you know that we do not recognise divorce—that in my eyes you are still her husband—will be her husband until one of you dies?"

It was he who stood now staring and stammering.

"You would let your religion come between us—separate us?"

"Oh, Maryon—my religion is *me*— It is what I feel myself—it is deep in me. One cannot escape from what one has felt and believed all one's life."

"But the thing is impossible," he cried wildly, fiercely; "I cannot lose you. You must leave your religion—What does a good woman want with religion?—Our Love shall be your religion—*I* will be your religion—I will never let you go."

"Hush, Marie, you don't know what you are saying," she said gently. "We must part. I can never, never marry you."

And despite her gentleness she stood like rock against the battery of his words, though he reasoned, pleaded, beguiled, even cursed, in his pain and wrath. Her heart turned to water, she was sick with love and pity for him, but through all she clung to her faith as a sailor might cling to a rock in a blinding, wrecking storm. For nothing he could say could she contemplate treachery to her people, her life-long principles, her God. Not so does the Catholic Church train its daughter against the hour of temptation.

When at last in the bitter madness of defeat and loss he caught and crushed her in his arms, kissing her savagely, she stayed silent, too proud

to struggle in those iron arms, but cold, cold as snow; until at last the cold purity of her penetrated him like a lance of ice, piercing his heart.

"Forgive me!—forgive me, Diane—I am a brute—I am mad!" he muttered, and stumbled away into the night.

. . . . . .

After a night of drenching rain, the camp out at the Carissima Mine lay sparkling in the morning sunshine. It was five A.M. with the promise of a golden day. Birds were twittering in tree and bush and wet leaves flickered and twinkled like diamonds, throwing off a myriad points of light. From the thatched roofs of the half dozen large huts in the clearing, steam arose, mingling with the blue spirals from newly kindled fires.

Hammond dressing leisurely in his hut looked out through his open door and the beauty and promise of the day seemed to take him by the throat, for he turned away from it with a face darkened and convulsed.

"God! What a day!" he groaned as a man might groan who has had a knife jabbed into him. For it is thus that Nature hunts and hurts those who loving her are yet a law unto themselves. Since he had lost Diane, all beautiful things struck at him with wounding, hurtful hands.

He had a sudden longing to let work go to the deuce for that day, to take horse and his desolate heart away to some lonely wild place where he could be absolutely alone, unobliged to speak or be spoken to by any; but he knew that it was impossible to think of such a thing. Girder and he were the only white men in the camp, and he could not leave all the work to Girder. The Mine Manager had been laid low by fever, and the sub-manager had taken the Cape cart and driven off with him the night before to Salisbury Hospital. As for Carr, he had been away on business for some days in the Lomagundi district.

It behoved Hammond to get his breakfast over and start for the native compound. There was a matter of three hundred boys or so to round up and hustle to their labours down the shaft. He threw a glance round for his boots, a special pair he kept for negotiating the wet sloppy clay at the bottom of the mine, and, seeing them nowhere, whistled for his body servant.

"My mine boots, Pongo," he jerked in the vernacular at the sleek-eyed Mashona who answered his signal. It transpired that the boots had been forgotten and were still in the saddle-hut covered with the dust and mud of yesterday! After receiving Hammond's comments on the

subject, Pongo disappeared in a hurry to fulfil his neglected task.

"And tell Candle to rustle with my breakfast," roared Pongo's lord like a lion in pain, and Candle at the sound did not need telling, but rustled to such good effect that in five minutes breakfast stood steaming on the rough wooden table that was pitched under a tree in the middle of the clearing. Girder very spick and span in white moleskins emerged from another hut, and Hammond, dressed all but his boots, and impatient of waiting, thrust his feet into a pair of silk slippers sent him at Christmas by his sister (and brought out by accident to the camp) and strolled out to join his friend at the table.

The three partners had been in camp for nearly six weeks. After that night on the Gymkhana Ground, Salisbury had no further hold for Hammond and he left the next morning, accompanied by Carr, grave and unquestioning, and followed a day or two later by Girder. He had never opened his lips on the subject of his changed plans, and he did not need to. Carr knew that the trouble was deep, and guessed the cause. Later, Girder brought the news of the broken engagement as briefly announced by Jack Heywood with whom Hammond had encompassed a short interview before leaving.

With the exception of a remark or two on the subject of the storm during the night, the two men took their breakfast in silence. Girder was at no time a talkative fellow, and, of late, Hammond's mood seldom invited gaiety. This morning he had not yet recovered from the savage misery that had smitten him in his hut, and still preoccupied was not his usual observant self, or he would have noticed something unnatural in the atmosphere of the camp.

About three hundred yards off from where they were sitting, a construction of heavy beams forming a rough hauling gear marked the mine's mouth, with the power-house and a number of small shanties grouped beside it. Beyond, and almost hidden by this group of buildings was the *kraal* or compound occupied by the natives who worked the mine. It was merely the usual collection of fifty or more rough *dagga* huts with thatched roofs drooping almost to the ground and lop-sided like a lot of old battered straw hats, surrounded by a high dagga wall; and from it came the usual morning sound peculiar to Kaffir kraals—a low humming sing-song of voices, with an occasional *tap* or *boom* on a vessel of metal or skin. What Hammond should have noticed and did not, was that his natives were humming a war-song—

one of those monotonous chants, flat and unmusical, yet full of some hidden power to stir the blood of a savage to dreams of reeking assegai and the crashing thud of knobkerry upon skull. The few "boys" loitering among the white men's huts, all personal servants, cast furtive glances tinged with surprise at the indifferent faces of the white men. Certainly *Inkos* Girder was but a new hand—only a year or two in Africa; but *Inkos* Hammond was an *induna*[1] who knew all things, and had fought in many Kaffir wars! *Clk!* Surely he must hear that song in the kraal and know its meaning!

Hammond indeed would probably have waked in a moment to a sense of something wrong, but, as it happened, his attention was suddenly averted by the sight of a man on horseback tearing full-tilt towards the camp.

"What the —— ?"

"Who the —— ?" They both stood up as the horse came clattering into the clearing, and its rider gasping and haggard flung himself down. He was one of de Rivas' assistants out at the Green Carnation Mine—a young Scotchman called Dent, well known to them both.

"The natives are 'up.' They've murdered

[1] Chief; captain.

everyone in our district except de Rivas and his wife," he burst forth. "You fellows had better get your horses and scoot for Mazoë before——."

"Steady, Dent," said Hammond in a voice like cold steel. At the first mention of trouble, he had thrown his eye around and in a flash heard and seen the danger signals about him—his servants' faces, the timbre of the song in the kraal, the sudden dead silence which, with the horseman's coming had fallen on camp and kraal, and *—the rustle of feet creeping up behind the mine-head shanties!*

"Pull yourself together. My boys are observing you. Get your revolver from your hut, Girder, and all the ammunition you can lay hands on, but keep them out of sight." (He had his own revolver on him—too wise a citizen of Africa ever to be without it.) "Sit down, my dear fellow," he now added heartily to Dent, and called for fresh coffee, sitting down himself too, but with his face towards the mine-head. Girder coming back casually from his hut resumed his chair. Speaking in an ordinary voice, smoking, and pouring out coffee, Hammond questioned the Scotchman and elicited facts.

The natives had set to work at four o'clock that morning, and systematically visiting every farm,

hut, and tent within the district had butchered the surprised and defenceless occupants. Everyone at the Green Carnation taken unawares had been knobkerried or assegaied to death—except de Rivas and his wife who got warning in time to barricade themselves in their ranch. Dent had been with them and the two men had managed to drive the demons off for a time, but it was certain that they would return. In the circumstances, de Rivas had ordered Dent to try and get away by means of an old mine working that came right up close to the back verandah of the house and bring help to them, for Mrs. de Rivas was a sick woman and could not travel any distance except in comfort, and well protected.

"They can't last out long," finished Dent dismally. "Half their ammunition is gone—Mrs. de Rivas is in hysterics most of the time—if I don't get help they'll be done for in a few hours —I must push on to Mazoë and——"

His sentence was broken off by the smart snap of a revolver. Hammond was firing across Girder's shoulder, not once but many times.

Snap—phit! Snap—pht! Snap—pht! And the grim eyes of the man behind the revolver snapped and flashed too, as he picked off one after another of those who led the advancing

horde. In less time than it takes to write it, five of the leaders were groaning in the dust, and the murderous band behind had fallen back dumbfounded, staring like fascinated rabbits at the man who now advanced on them still covering them with that gleaming deadly revolver and his ice-cold deadly glance. At last, he flung them a few brief words in their own tongue.

"Get down to your work in the mine. Anyone who loiters will be shot—like these things here."

They gazed at the "things" for a silent moment, then cringing before the white man like the dogs they were, they dropped assegais and knob-kerries in the dust and retreated sullenly, step by step, to the mine mouth. Girder close behind Hammond, opened the little gate leading to the enclosure round the shaft and hustled half a dozen boys into the power-house to set the cage going. Then, one by one, with downcast looks and modest mien the boys filed into the cage and were lowered in little companies down the mine. Hammond stood by silent, dominating, the sunshine glinting on his revolver barrel, Boston, casual and indifferent, lounging beside him. The two other men, unobliged even to draw their guns, contented themselves with speeding up an occasional loiterer by means of a brisk application of the boot. In

the end, every "boy" of three hundred was at the bottom of the shaft, except those in the power-house. Hammond approached them.

"You too—get in," he remarked briefly, and they got in, humble and sleek, with air deprecative of giving so much trouble. Dent and Girder took possession of the power-house and worked the cage, for as is well known, two white men can do the work of six natives any day in the week. Afterwards they cut the steel ropes that held the cage and it fell crashing to the bottom of the shaft.

"*That's* all right," said Hammond at last. "They've plenty of water, and a couple of days with empty stomachs will take the cheek out of them. At the end of that time, if all goes well, we'll be here to let 'em up again—if not, so much the worse for them."

"The blessed tinkers!" was all that Girder permitted himself to remark.

"Now you fellows," said Hammond briskly, "take your horses and beat it for Mazoë, hell-for-leather. Get a party together—half a dozen guns and make for the Green Carnation. I shall go on ahead and help de Rivas hold out."

"I'm coming with you," said Girder carelessly. Hammond looked at him coldly.

"You will kindly do as I ask you, Bill. If you

meet trouble between here and Mazoë, as you probably will, and one of you is potted, there is still a chance of the other getting in to give the alarm."

Girder merely smiled. Hammond knew that obstinate smile, and he also knew there was no time to lose.

"Don't be a fool, Bill," he said brusquely. "We are not in this for glory, or fun, or friendship. Just remember there's a woman in the matter, will you?—a sick woman. What you two fellows have got to do—or one or other of you—is to get together a big enough party to convey her in a cart to Mazoë. If you are delayed you will probably find when you reach us that we have left the ranch and taken to the bush. The house won't be safe once the ammunition has given out—and I know the country all round there like the palm of my hand. There are plenty of places we can lie doggo in until help comes. But you must get help, and get it quick. Take the fresh horses, you've farther to go than I. I'll take Dent's. Go on now, Bill. Don't be pig-headed—and take charge of Boston will you? I don't want him with me. Where is the beggar?"

No one knew. A moment before he had been lounging idly against the power-house, his tongue

lolloping from his mouth, his eye expressing boredom; a moment later he simply was not. It is hard to say what instinct had bidden him make himself scarce in a manner as swift and unobtrusive as possible, and turn into a motionless, sand-coloured ant-heap about fifty yards from the road down which anyone leaving camp must pass. No one had time to look for him and no one would have found him in any case. Hammond let loose a bad word, gave Girder's hand a parting grip, and skimmed out of camp on Dent's horse.

Within a quarter of a mile of the Green Carnation, he dismounted, and, leaving the horse in the bush, advanced under cover and with great caution towards the ranch. It was then that the rough rocky ground and thorns under foot brought him the realisation that he was still wearing the pair of silk slippers made and sent him by his sister for a Christmas present.

. . . . . .

It was a little dell-like place—not more than ten feet by six, hollowed out by the heavy streams that in bad weather came rushing down the slopes of the kopje above it, darkened by the thick bush all round, full of small sharp stones and thorns, and red ants that stung like wasps, with not a single smooth tree trunk or flat rock to lean against.

Still, it was a hiding-place; and to three people it had been for as many days, a haven and a home. Three people—to say nothing of the dog!

It was indeed Boston who lay in one of those triangular positions which only a dog can find reposeful, his head on a stone, his tongue lolling languorously from his mouth, one eye closed, the other cocked on his master. For Hammond seated uneasefully upon a small rock, his arms round his knees, his empty pipe in his mouth, was plainly busy on an intricate problem, and Boston too was interested in the solution of that problem.

Close beside them, touching feet with Hammond and the dog, de Rivas half-lay, half-leaned in the cramped space, painfully shifting his wounded leg every few minutes. Between his lips was a thick white mimosa thorn which he bit on when he shifted, as a wounded soldier might bite on a bullet to keep in his trouble. Mrs. de Rivas lay sleeping on the men's folded coats.

"Well—what next, Hammond?" asked de Rivas in a whisper. They had been obliged to whisper for days; the natives were all round them in the bush, searching; but Hammond had chosen his retreat well, and the odds were against discovery so long as they lit no fires and were not heard talking. It was characteristic of the man,

however, that this business of whispering annoyed him more than any of the risks and hardships of the past few days. To have to whisper on account of a lot of murdering niggers!— When all he wanted was to get out and beat the brains out of a score of them—and he would too if——

Mrs. de Rivas gave a little moan in her sleep. So he whispered, in spite of his fierce desires.

"I shall start for Salisbury to-night."

"Salisbury!—on foot?"

"It's no use trying Mazoë. Something's gone wrong there or Girder would have been back by now."

"But Salisbury is seventy miles!"

"Sixty when you know your map."

"Well, sixty!—without food! And you've got no boots!"

It was no use offering his own. He was a big man and his feet were on a generous scale. As for Hammond, he could not forbear to smile when he looked at the travesties from which his toes protruded—a few rags and ribbons of dark blue silk.

"No; but I've got feet."

He had indeed—the most famous feet at Harvard in his time, and in Africa at any time. All the same, he cursed himself for criminal carelessness

in leaving his camp improperly shod; for he too knew that sixty miles barefoot through an enemy's country, over krantz and kop and rough unbroken ground, was not going to be the funniest thing that had ever happened to him. Still, they couldn't sit whispering here forever, and Cara de Rivas had got to be saved.

She had stood the strain well up till now, but it was doubtful if she would last out much longer. *And she must not die.* No woman in the same case would be allowed to die if he could help it. But only he knew the stain and disgrace it would be on him to let her of all women die, whose death would give him his heart's desire.

When de Rivas spoke again, his whisper had grown fainter. His thoughts appeared to have taken the same direction as Hammond's.

"How am I going to keep her alive, Hammond? She can't go on without water."

"I shall fill the can before I start, and you must try and make it spin out for three days. I promise you I shan't be longer than that."

Fortunately they had thought to bring a can with them in their hurried escape from the ranch, and Hammond stole out every night and filled it from the river not two hundred yards away. De Rivas' wounded leg entirely incapacitated him

from doing anything; Hammond had been obliged to carry him more than half the way on the night of their flight.

"Three days!" de Rivas was thinking to himself. "He can never do it even if he had boots!"

Three days was too short a time in which to walk to Salisbury and bring back help. Three days was only long when contemplated from the point of view of a man whose larder is empty, and whose death lurks in the shadows.

"What am I going to give her to eat?"

"I've thought of that too," said Hammond quietly. The other man looked up questioningly. The problem of provisions had been a haunting one ever since they arrived in their refuge. If Hammond had a solution to it now, why not before? But Hammond was apparently not inclined to be communicative. He merely sat there staring at Boston; and Boston as though suddenly aware of something personal in his master's attention rose suddenly, and in his silent, floundering way came over and laid his nose on Hammond's knee. Hammond after a moment or so raised the dog's head in his hands and looked into the golden brown eyes, tender and trustful as a woman's, far more trustworthy than many women's. Then, for Maryon Hammond, he

did a strange thing; he bent his head and kissed his dog's nose. De Rivas bit suddenly on the thorn between his lips, and looked away. He had seen Hammond's eyes, and it is not good to see the eyes of a strong man in pain. He knew now what Hammond meant to do to keep him and his wife alive during the next three days.

When Cara de Rivas awoke from her long sleep of exhaustion it was dusk, and she found herself alone with her husband in the dell. She crept to his side and kissed him with a whispered inquiry for the pain of his wound. Then:

"Where is Maryon?"

Unfalteringly, without the flicker of an eyelid, de Rivas repeated the lesson in which Hammond had instructed him.

"He has gone to get water—and Cara,—he has had a great stroke of luck—got a buck in a kind of primitive trap he fixed up last night. We shall have meat for several days."

"Meat—*but no fire!*" she said, a little spasm of horror contracting her weary face. He put his arm round her.

"Dearest, this isn't the time to be squeamish —for my sake, and for the sake of our little kid to come—just think of it as sustenance—close your eyes and get it down. Lots of sick people have to

eat raw meat by order, and think nothing of it. And thank Hammond—don't forget to thank Hammond before he goes, for—all he has done for us."

"Before he goes?" she cried with frightened eyes. "Where? Why?"

Gently, with more confidence in his words than in his heart, he explained Hammond's plan to her, and her eyes brightened. She had faith in Maryon's plans; they always "came off." And it would be only three days! It was a long time—but Marie would come back with help, and they would both he saved.

Suddenly, without a sound of his coming, Hammond was with them, carrying the can of water, and something wrapped in long fresh grass. Immediately Cara cried:

"Boston? Where is Boston, Marie?"

"I parted with him down by the river," said Hammond, adding after a moment: "He is busy with part of the buck I got."

He did not speak for a long time after that, seeming very intent on what he was doing—tearing the sleeves of his coat in strips to bind round his feet. His shirt had been used up for de Rivas' wound. After he had finished this, the only

preparation for his journey, he sat talking cheerfully to Cara for awhile, asking for messages for friends in Salisbury, and inviting her to choose the men she wanted for her "relief patrol." Hardly in keeping with these gay whispers were his words in de Rivas' off ear, as he thrust his revolver into de Rivas' off pocket.

"I'll take yours instead. It may serve to smash a skull with, at a pinch."

Now de Rivas' revolver was empty; it was Hammond's that contained the one cartridge for a certain emergency—the frightful emergency which all brave men who take charge of women in a savage country must be willing to face! But Cara, whom this little incident chiefly concerned, knew nothing of it. Almost light-heartedly she bade Hammond farewell, thanking him as her husband had told her for all he had done, far from knowing how much that was, and how much it might be before the end.

At the last, de Rivas held out his hand and said hoarsely:

"If you don't mind shaking, Marie—and saying you forgive me?"

It was the first time since he stole Maryon Hammond's wife that he had used the name that once in college days was sweet between them. He

would harldy have dared now, but somehow he felt he owed it to Hammond's generosity to dare, if only to let the other man smite him with the just word of wrath. But Hammond took his hand. They were all in the shadow of death.

"And me too, Marie?" whispered the woman through her tears.

"That's all right, Cara," he said gently, taking hers in turn. A moment later he had gone upon his way.

. . . . . .

In the Salisbury laager, which was the Salisbury prison put into a state of defence, with sand-bags and waggons all round it and machine guns pitched on every eminence, the air was charged with gloom and rage. It was not because of war; Rhodesians after '93 were inured to war and had learned to accept philosophically its bitters with its sweets. What hurt them now was that this was not war, but black murder. There had been no decent open fighting—only secret, savage murder of men and women in far places. Murder —and worse! Men bit their mouths close on revolting stories that it would do no good for the women to hear; and women came into laager, night after night, white-faced and sick of heart. The whole country was "up" in rebellion, but

except in Matabeleland there had been no actual fighting. Overwhelming small isolated bands of men cannot be called fighting—but it was the nearest approach to it that the Mashonas had made. That was what they had attempted in the case of the Mazoë patrol. On hearing that there had been wholesale slaughter at Mazoë, and that the survivors (mostly women and children) were huddled in a house waiting for the end, twenty-six picked men had ridden out from Salisbury to the rescue. They had reached Mazoë just in time—and getting the women, children, and wounded men into a waggon protected by sheets of corrugated iron, set out on the return march to Salisbury. These twenty-six men had had to fight every inch of the way with thousands of natives, but not one dead or wounded man of the gallant band was left by the wayside. As they fell, their comrades picked them up and thrust them into the waggon, and thus in some wise or another came back one and every man of the famous patrol!

Carr with an arm shot off and his horse shot under him, was one of those who had to lie helpless and raging amongst the women—raging because he knew nothing of the fate of his best friend! All that he knew was that the bodies

of Girder and Dent had been found on the outskirts of Mazoë. One of the Carissima boys was reported to have stated that Hammond had gone to the help of the de Rivas. But it was now known that de Rivas' place was burnt to the ground and not a living soul left at the Green Carnation. Small wonder that the bitterness of Carr's heart was as the bitterness of the heart of Job in the last stage of his torment!

It was now generally believed that everyone in the mining districts who had not managed to escape at the first alarm to Salisbury was of the doomed and dead. Diane Heywood looked into Bernard Carr's eyes and saw that belief there and her face took a deeper shadow upon it. From the first entry of wounded refugees, she had offered her services to the good nursing nuns, and striven in ardent labour and many a weary vigil to dull her heart's fierce pain. When once she and Carr had read each other's misery he forgave her for what she had done to Hammond (though he knew not what it was), and they were friends for ever after. She was often by his bedside, reading sometimes, or talking a little, but more often both were silent, thinking of what they dared not speak.

Oh! to see his eyes again! To know that he

was still on God's fair earth!—not cut down, beaten to his knees with knobkerries, assegaied by foul cowardly brutes whose courage was only in their numbers! Only to know that he had had a fair chance—out in the open with a gun in his hand, not trapped in a hut as so many had been! But all that had happened at the Carissima remained dark and unknown; and the mystery of its fate lay heavy on the hearts of those in Salisbury laager.

Then late one afternoon shouts on the clear April air! Shouts and cries, hoots and yells of triumph from afar—nearer, nearer, until right at the laager gates; then crowds of men rushing in, all thrusting, heaving, shoving to be near a central figure—someone being borne high on men's shoulders!

Diane, standing in the verandah of the gaoler's house where Carr lay sick, shaded her eyes with her hand to see better through the sunset rays. They were calling Hammond's name—but was *that* Maryon Hammond?—that haggard, tattered wreck, brown with dirt, disfigured by thorn-scratches and dried blood, ragged, shirtless, with bare arms sticking through a sleeveless coat!

Yes, it was Maryon Hammond; he looked up at her as they carried him past, and it was as though he saluted her with a sword.

Ah, God! if she could have gone to him and taken his head to her breast. But how could she? —he was not hers but another woman's! All she might do was rejoice that a brave man still lived. Blindly, with faltering feet, she found her way back to Carr's room where she had been sitting when the noise came. She wanted to share the news with someone—someone who loved him too. Afterwards they sat silent in the twilight. Carr with a man's philosophy was content now and could possess his soul in patience until Hammond came to him. But Diane knew not what power helped her to sit there so still, listening to the sounds in the gaol yard. For they had not discontinued for a moment, those sounds. Always men's voices continued to rise and fall, shouting excitedly, crying Hammond's name, questioning, even it seemed remonstrating. There was much jingle of harness too, and the sound of horses being led out. At last, a wilder hubbub than ever, an uproar of mad hurrahs, cheer upon cheer ringing on the evening air, then—the thud of horses' hoofs and the rattle of cart wheels!

Some word he caught in all that wild bedlam of sound made Carr spring out of bed and tear down the passage that led to the verandah, with Diane Heywood running after him.

"What is it? What is it? Where is he?"

After the first amazed stare at this madman in pyjamas there were many to cry him the news.

"He's gone back again!—What do you think of that? After doing sixty miles in his bare feet!—Gone back to get de Rivas and his wife! Our fellows, twenty of 'em were ready to go alone—but nothing on earth or off it could stop him from going too—not the Judge, nor the Administrator, nor an Archangel from heaven—said they could never find 'em without him—or might find 'em too late! His feet are all to bits—I tell you, man, he hasn't got feet any more—only some black currant jelly!—They're so bad he has to ride in a cart!—but he *would* go—he *would* go. Whether he'll ever come back again—with those feet——?"

. . . . . .

But he did come back. It took longer to bring in the two refugees than it had taken Maryon Hammond to walk the distance in his bare feet, for there was fighting to be done on the return journey; but Cara de Rivas and her husband were safe and sound in Salisbury at last, none the worse for their three days' vigil.

And once more a man riding on men's shoulders looked up at a girl in the gaol verandah and saluted her with the blue glance of his eyes; and

she with her hand raised to her forehead saluted him in return, as a soldier might salute a conqueror, her eyes full of pride. For only she and he knew how great was this victory in which lay their defeat.

"Do we think Victory great?

"And so it is.

"But now it seems to me when all is done, that Defeat is great, and Death and Dismay are great!"

Long before they came to fetch her, she had heard the news—the bitter, tragic news. It was on all men's lips.

"His feet are gone. Nothing can save Marie Hammond's feet—the fleetest feet in Africa!—gone!—done for! *Nothing but amputation can save his life—and he won't have it done!*"

It was true. He refused to have it done. He lay and laughed in the doctors' faces.

"Take my feet off? Leave me to spend the rest of my days on my back—or crawling about the earth like a maimed rat? Oh, no, my dear fellows!—No job for you to-day?—nothing doing! All right, I'll be dead before morning if you say so. That's not such bad luck either. I think a good long rest is indicated anyway. I'd like a rest, by Jove! Only I should like to be left alone

now, if you don't mind, with my pal Carr—and —Ah! yes, if Miss Heywood would stay too—? Leave us three alone, will you, until the end?"

. . . . . .

Diane Heywood never left Salisbury. A grave kept her there, and you may find her there to this day, tending the sick and sad, helping all those whose burdens seem too heavy for their shoulders.

Watchers by the Road

Watchers by the Road

THE sky-line was scarlet from east to west, and above the scarlet lay massed bronze. The rest of the world was composed of tan-coloured kopjes and rocks, and the road along which the Cape cart dolorously crawled, resembled a river of dust rising in mountainous waves through which the setting sun loomed like a blood-red heart.

It was the road from the Transvaal to Tuli, and the cart had been travelling along it for hours, but was still many miles from the wayside hotel where a night's rest for man and beast was waiting; and the offside leader had gone dead lame, while the other three horses appeared to have lost all enthusiasm for life. On the crest of a rise, the cart came to a standstill, and they stood with hung heads and quivering barrels panting under their lathered harness. The driver descended; a burly Cape boy, he had the thick mouth of a Hottentot and the hang-dog swagger of a low-

class Boer; but as far as horses were concerned he was an angel from Heaven. When he spoke to his beasts, they lifted up their despairing heads trembling like lovers to his voice, seeming to stand together again with fresh resolution while he rubbed the nose of one, slapped another's soapy flank, and once more examined the leader's foot. Afterwards he emitted a kind of resigned grunt and stood chewing a bit of grass he had plucked in stooping. The two men crammed in the body of the cart with several dogs, guns, and a mass of shooting-kit looked on grimly. They were merciful men who hated to see a beast suffer, but they also hated the prospect of a night on the veld without provisions or blankets. They were weary as only a day's travelling in a Cape cart under the hot sun can make men weary; dead beat, begrimed, and hungry. Moreover they were in a hurry to reach their destination; if they had not been they would have waited for the weekly mail-coach instead of chartering a special cart.

The significance of the driver's grunt was not lost on one at least of them, a dark man burnt almost black, with hard blue eyes and a grim lip, who looked as though with a red handkerchief on his head instead of a slouch hat he would have

made a first-class pirate. Never handsome, a broken nose, and a deep scar which began over one unflinching eye and finished somewhere in the roots of his short thick hair had not softened his appearance. Yet no woman or dog (the two have strangely similar tastes where men are concerned) would have glanced twice at the other man (a well set up, good-looking fellow of thirty), while Dark Carden was about. The latter, however, if he returned the glances of women with interest, also knew something of men and horses, and because of this he now saw very well that the leader was done for and the driver resigned to a night on the veld. Disentangling himself from the shooting-kit he threw himself out of the cart, and the dogs leaped after him barking joyously.

"This is a damned look-out, Swartz!"

"Yes, Baas," assented Swartz, not unamiably. "The leader's leg is gone for sure, and the others are done up. We can't make Webb's to-night."

"How far is it?"

"About thirty miles yet."

Carden looked at the man in the cart.

"Feel inclined to tramp it, Talfourd?"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Talfourd. "Do you?"

"Not much!" said Carden smiling. "We'll camp. After all we've got the buck." He gave

a glance to the back of the cart where a beautiful little riet buck still warm, but with the glaze of death over its eyes was suspended. Then his keen eye travelled swiftly over the surrounding country. The dust was subsiding, and it could be seen that they were in a wild place of lonely kopjes and immense patches of grey-green bush. Far off, taller, greener trees growing thick and close as moss outlined the banks of the Crocodile River. Across the midst of the scene, round kops and through bush, curved and curled the dusty white road that led to Tuli, and thence upwards and onwards through Mashonaland and Matabeleland to the North.

Swartz had begun to outspan the horses, knee-haltering each so that they would not roam too far.

"They'll be safer than they would have been fifteen or twenty years ago," he announced. "It was somewhere about here, on the banks of the river that Baas Kavanagh, the great hunter, was killed by a lion."

"By George!" said Carden softly under his breath, and his blue eyes took on a misty look that softened them curiously. He was thinking of Francis Kavanagh, the big, lawless, lovable Irishman who hailed from his own part of Ireland

—County Carlow, and had all the magic of the west in his voice and eyes. Kavanagh had been the hero of Carden's boyhood dreams, the man who first inspired him with a love and longing for Africa. His thoughts went back in a straight line to the day when, as a college boy, he had last shaken the hand of the Explorer, famous even at thirty for his travels and exploits. He had told Kavanagh of his intention to come to Africa as soon as college days were over, and the hunter had warmly urged him to come as soon as possible to join a projected Expedition into a part of Africa that had not been penetrated. Carden had indeed left Ireland within two years of that time, but by then Kavanagh had died accidentally and mysteriously as men do die on the veld, with nothing but native rumour to tell of the manner of his death; and Carden with no friend to join, and too poor to fit out waggons for the hunting, adventurous life that lured him, was obliged to make for the comparatively civilised places where money was to be made. Destiny led him to the Diamond Fields, where, gradually absorbed by an unexpected gift in himself for finance, and fascinated by the life of danger and excitement, he had been caught in the big money-making whirlpool, and had stayed. Then when

the current set for the Transvaal where the Game was even keener, and the life wilder, with gold for stakes instead of diamonds, he had gone with it, and continued to play the great Game for all he was worth. But always, always he meant to leave it some day, and go where his dreams called him, to the wild, strange spots and lonely places of Africa—sometimes he seemed to hear them calling in the night with a voice that was like a woman's voice. But in the morning he had gone back to the Game, the money-game, which is one of the most fascinating in the world, and was in those early Rand days full of "battle, murder, and sudden death." If he had missed hunting lions he had closed with many a human tiger, as his scars, hard eyes, and grim mouth testified. Though usually the top tiger, he had sometimes been brought down himself. Twice he had made and lost enormous fortunes; and now, only moderately rich, but on the eve of a great financial coup that if properly brought off would make him a millionaire, he had suddenly thrown down the Game, and leaving the haunts of money set out for the wilds. He had listened to the voice of his dream at last, and more than ever it had sounded like the voice of a woman; only sweeter than any woman's voice he had ever heard. In haste, yet with the steady

purpose of one who carries out a long-formed plan, he had fitted up his waggons, sent them on to Tuli, and was now on his way to join them and three friends there. His intention was to be away for a year and a half at least, and perhaps longer.

And the end of his second day's travelling had brought him thus unexpectedly to the place where Francis Kavanagh had died! Ah, well! God rest him for a fine Irishman, a lawless lover, a true friend, and a brave man! The mist cleared from Carden's eyes and his usual unfeeling, not to say stony, expression returned. He cast another alert look over the country, and instantly espied at some distance a broken-down cattle kraal, and near by it the stooping figure of a Kaffir gathering *mis*. In a straight line from there, pitched on the side of a kopje, and by reason of its colouring hardly distinguishable from the bush about it was a grey stone house; a light spot in front of it might have been the flicker of a woman's dress. There was also the gleam of a fire.

"That's a farm, Swartz. Whose place can it be?"

Swartz gazed in the direction indicated, and his stolid countenance took on a certain degree of interest.

"*Ach wot, ja!* That must be old Johannes de Beer's, the transport rider's place, yes! I heered he had come to live about here, but he won't be no good to us, Baas. *A slegte kerel!* Says he hates the rooineks and would like to shoot them like *schelm* wherever he meets them on the veld."

"Ah! What part is he from?"

"The Transvaal, Baas. But he's different from other Boers. He lived in Delagoa Bay when he was a young *kerel* and went a trek once on a Portuguese gunboat and learnt a lot of *slegte* ways from these dago sailors. I've heard that he is all covered with red and blue anchors and animals that he had made on himself."

"Very interesting," said Carden dryly. "We may as well see what this genius can do for us, Tal. If he won't put us up for the night we may at least be able to buy some bread to eat with our buck. Come on."

"Gad! I'm glad to stretch my legs again," said Talfourd getting stiffly out of the cart. Preceded by the bounding dogs they made their way to the house. As they drew near they recognised the typical Boer farm—a low sprawling building with high *stoep* and verandah. The white thing Carden had noticed was, as he had supposed, the dress of a woman sitting on a wooden

bench by the door. About thirty yards from the house was a fire with a large three-legged pot over it, and another woman, a Kaffir with a shrewd withered face squatted beside it stirring with a long metal spoon. A blue vapour rose from the pot and the scent of roasting coffee beans was on the air. One lonely, sinister-looking tree grew by itself to the left of the stoep and a baboon chained to it barked hoarsely at them as they approached. The old Kaffir regarded them with unfriendly eyes, but the woman in the verandah rose and came down the steps and they saw that she was a young girl, slim and straight in a pink print dress with her face far back in a print sun-bonnet. All that could be distinguished in the failing light was that like most Boer girls she had a fine complexion. Carden took off his hat and shook hands with her in the Boer fashion, addressing her in good Dutch.

"*Dag Jefrouw!* Is this Johannes de Beer's place?"

"*Jah Mynheer.* This is *Greis-Kopje*[1] farm," she answered. Her voice was surprisingly soft and melodious, and it seemed to Carden that he had heard one like it before.

"Our cart has broken down, and we want

[1] Grey-hill.

to know if Mr. de Beer can put us up for the night. Perhaps we could speak to him?"

"He has gone to Pretoria," said the girl. "There is only Grietje, Yacop, and me here."

"We cannot do anything for you," said the old woman who had approached, and stood by with the spoon in her hand. "This is not an hotel, and the old Baas would be angry if we took you in." She scowled at them, but when she saw Swartz who had come up behind them her features slightly relaxed, and she gave him a curt nod.

"This is pretty tough," said Carden, putting his hat on the back of his head in an absent-minded way and laughing a little. "Well! We'd better go back to our buck, I suppose, and make a fire in the open. We can get some sleep anyhow."

But the girl suddenly began to speak. Her speech had a queer little twist to it that made it unusual, but the ugly Dutch fashion of clipping the ends of words betrayed that she was colonial and jarred Carden's fine ear.

"Oh, no," she said excitedly, "Grietje is mad. You mustn't go away. Of course we will do all we can for you. Come inside. Don't mind Grietje. Would you like some coffee?"

"Wouldn't we?" said Talfourd. "And if we could only have some soap and water——"

Carden said nothing but stared keenly into the girl's "cappie" trying to see her face. She led the way indoors and they followed her, Talfourd limping with weariness. But fatigue was gone from Carden's face. Something in the way the girl walked and in the lines of the slim young figure in the faded print dress refreshed him like wine.

From the verandah they entered a large low room remarkably unlike the usual *Eat-kammer* of a Boer house. It is true there were guns in the corner, karosses on the furniture, and skins on the floor; but the things were arranged with taste, and there were flowers about; a big jar of wild jasmine on the chimney-piece with long fronds trailed upwards over a fine pair of koodoo horns nailed near the ceiling, and on the table a native bowl full of leaves and bright wild geraniums.

"What a capital room!" said Talfourd full of enthusiasm; but Carden always and ever remained silent.

"If you will sit down I will see about a room for you," said the girl, in her soft voice and bad accent. They protested that they wished to give no trouble, but she opened a door and dis-

appeared, returning after a matter of five minutes to lead the way to a bedroom which astonished them even more than the *Eat-kammer* had done. It contained only one bed, a very white and nice one, but there was a sofa, large and comfortable-looking, covered by a beautiful leopard kaross. Rough dark tables had white calico cloths edged with narrow lace upon them. A white wooden shelf on the wall held a few books and again there were flowers everywhere.

"If you do not mind using my room to wash and rest in until supper time," said the girl, "there will be two rooms got ready for you by to-night. Please lie down and rest if you wish to."

She left them and they stood staring at the bed with its white counterpane. It was so simple and dainty, so obviously a girl's bed. Talfourd threw himself on the sofa.

"H'm!" said Carden. "I suppose I've got to camp on the floor? It won't be the first time anyway."

In the meantime he poured out water in the white enamel bowl and got rid of some of the dust under which he was hidden. Afterwards he wiped up with his handkerchief the splashes he had made, and left everything as dainty as before.

"Be careful to leave the wash-hand stand as

you find it Talfourd," he said, with something very like command in his voice. But there was no response from the weary Talfourd who was sleeping like a child. Carden smiled and looked about him for wherewith to do his hair, but when he saw the little wooden brush and white bone comb he made shift to groom his back head with the flat of his hand, after which he carefully hid the brush and comb on the principle that what was too good for him was certainly too good for Talfourd. He had discarded his tie in the heat of the day, and several buttons of his thin silk shirt were undone exposing a tanned, muscular throat; he carefully fastened them up, and though they came undone again a moment or two later he did not notice it so concentrated was he on his thoughts, whistling softly under his breath while he moved about the room. When he had quite finished he roused Talfourd, told him to get a bustle on him, and opening the door went back to the living-room.

Candles had been lighted, and the table laid with a spotless white cloth, cups and saucers, tin plates, bone knives and forks, and a large loaf of the brown meal bread known as *simmels broot*. A fine savoury smell of riet buck crisping and singeing on red embers came from outside

where Swartz and Grietje, now reinforced by the old Kaffir who had been picking up *mis*, were officiating over the fire. Carden sat down by the open window, and presently a door from another part of the house opened and the girl came in, carrying a pot of coffee. She had taken off her cappie and by the flickering candle-light Carden saw the smoky black hair growing above her brows like the glossy spread wings of a raven; the bar of golden freckles that lay across her nose; her silky curved mouth; dewy, mist-coloured eyes that like all eyes that have looked long on great spaces were full of dreams of forests and rivers, and seemed to reflect the shadows of far blue mountains. God had been good to her. She was lovely as a flower.

She sat down on the other side of the table and she and Carden looked at each other. The pupils of the man's eyes expanded, giving a curious intensity to his glance, and something in hers seemed to leap out like a swift radiant spirit to him and become his. She gave a deep sigh and her lids closed, as though some living vital thing gone out of her, she were dead, or asleep. For an instant she stayed so, then rose quietly and went out of the room. Carden breathing heavily like a man who has been running, and with

a rushing sound in his ears, heard her speaking to the servants at the fire, and a moment later Talfourd came in with the bustle he had been told to acquire.

The girl sat with them at dinner, serving them daintily to the luscious venison, and cutting big slices of the *simmels broot* that tasted like wheat with the heat of the sun still in it. Later she poured them out cups of the coffee whose beans had so lately been roasted over Grietje's fire. She had little strong hands burnt a pale brown by the sun.

Afterwards the two men walked up and down smoking in the moonlight that was bright as daylight only softer and more tender. It transformed the walls of the mean farmhouse so that they seemed to be made of alabaster with the shadowy branches of the lonely tree etched in ebony upon them. In the distance the broken-down kraal looked a gracious ruin. A little wind had risen and drifting wraiths of cloud gave the impression that the moon was racing across the sky with one lone silver star following her deathlessly. When they came back to the verandah they found the girl sitting on the wooden bench, and with her permission they sat beside her.

"By Jove! What a night!" said Talfourd, and

feeling well after a rest and an excellent meal began in a very fine tenor voice to sing:

Have you forgotten, love, so soon, that night, that lovely night of June,
When down the tide so idly dreaming, we floated where the moon lay gleaming?
My heart was weary and oppressed, by some sweet longing unconfessed,
When like an answer to my sighing, your hand in mine was gently lying.

When he had finished, the girl said in a low tremulous voice, "Sing again!"

So he sang Tosti's *Adieu;* and then Schubert's *Serenade.* Such sounds, such words had perhaps never before been heard in the vicinity of the little farmhouse. Yet who can tell! Carden's Irish imagination evolved the idea that many beautiful things must have been spoken and thought before the flower-like girl by his side had been born. He stirred a little on the old bench at the thought, and the girl stirred too, putting her hand down beside her as if to rise. Carden did not see her movement, but by some strange instinct his hand went down too and found hers there, and finding it took it. She left it for an instant in his, then tried to draw it away; but he held it closely as he always held

things he once took a grip on, whether they belonged to him or not, and she left it there. So they sat listening hand in hand while Talfourd sang his last song to them.

I want no star in Heaven to guide me,
I need no sun, no moon to shine,
While I have you, dear love, beside me,
While I know that you are mine.
I need not fear whate'er betide me, for straight and sweet my pathway lies,
I want no star in Heaven to guide me, while I gaze in your dear eyes.

I hear no birds at twilight calling,
I catch no music in the streams,
While your golden words are falling
While you whisper in my dreams.
Every sound of joy enthralling, speaks in your dear voice alone
While I hear your fond lips calling, while you speak to me, my own.

Again the girl's strong little hand fluttered like a bird under his, but he held it fast. He liked things that tried to flutter away and escape from him.

I want no kingdom where thou art, love,
I want no throne to make me blest
While within thy tender heart, love,
Thou wilt take my heart to rest.

Kings must play a weary part, love, thrones must ring with wild alarms,
But the kingdom of my heart, love, lies within thy loving arms.

At last, Talfourd proposed to go to bed, but first he wanted to know what the plans were for the morning. Swartz was called up and a discussion held. There were no horses to be had at the farm, for it appeared that old de Beer had taken away the only two he possessed.

Swartz's plan was to take the best horse of the four, ride on to Webb's and bring back a fresh span in the evening; and Carden thought it a good plan, if Miss de Beer would allow them to encroach so far upon her hospitality.

"We'll earn our dinner, if there is any shooting to be got about here," he said.

"Oh, yes; plenty of red-wing partridge, stem buck, and duiker." She was standing opposite him now, having escaped in the general movement.

"Much *matatendela* also," volunteered the old native man Yacop who had come up to take part in the indaba. Carden laughed.

"They'll do for you, Tal; guinea-fowl need a sprinting athlete after them, and you are younger than I am." He looked very boyish and happy as he spoke.

"All the more reason why I should go to bed at once," said Talfourd. "Good-night, Miss de Beer, and many, many thanks for pouring oil and wine upon us the way you have done. You have been a good Samaritan indeed!"

"No; it was you who found me by the roadside," she answered with a grave little smile, but she looked at Carden only. He lingered behind with her, hoping she would come and sit beside him again, but she did not move from where she stood leaning against the verandah pole. Swartz and Yacop had gone back to squat by the fire, and the former had produced the inevitable concertina that every Cape boy knows how to manipulate. Carden and the girl stayed listening to his melancholy strains, though it seemed to the man that it was the surging of waves in his ears that he heard, and little drums in all his pulses beating a call to arms.

Dark Carden had been loved many times and loved carelessly back, but never had he met the woman he wanted to take and keep for ever in his life. He had an idea that such a woman existed, in Ireland, if anywhere. Certainly he had long ago decided that he would never marry any but a woman from his own land; and she must be beautiful, accomplished, well-bred, and

virtuous at that. Nothing but the best was good enough for Dark Carden. But he was in no great hurry to find this ideal wife. Life and women had treated him too well for him to be in any hurry to change his ways and curtail his liberty. In the meantime he had put away all such thoughts for awhile.

The spell of the wilderness was on him and it was stronger than any spell he had ever felt. Passing strange to find this flower of a girl blossoming here on the very edge of the wild! and more than passing sweet to linger awhile, sharing the moonlight night with her, stirred by the forbidden magic of her girlhood. For girls to him represented forbidden fruit. Everything else in the orchard might be reached after, or climbed for, by those who like himself had the nerve and taste for the pastime. But girls, however ripe and inviting, however close they leaned to the gathering hand, were not for this orchard thief. It was the one clause in his code concerning women which he had never broken. True he had not been greatly tempted, for girls had never held any extraordinary allure for him. The more astonishing then to find himself so troubled by the sight and sound of this one. When he thought of that something which had come wing-

ing its way from her eyes to his, and of how her hand had fluttered under his and then lain still, content, the blood tingled through his veins; he was glad to be alive.

A longing to hear the voice which charmed him in spite of the jarring Dutch accent made him break the spell of silence that had fallen on them.

"I do not even know your name," he said in the gentle way he had with women.

"Frances," she answered as gently. "Frances de Beer."

"But you are not Dutch?" he said, though it mattered little to him if she declared herself Siamese or a native of Timbuctoo. The important thing was that she was *she*, a beautiful, alluring, and forbidden thing.

"No; my mother was an Englishwoman who married a Boer. I am the love child of an Irishman."

A wave of astonishment mingled with pity surged through him at her strange words, and all the tragedy they implied both for her and the mother who had borne her in suffering and sorrow.

And now he knew why this girl's eyes were deep and full of dreams, why her hair framed her face like the spread wings of a raven, why her mouth was curved to the shape of a kiss incarnate.

She was the child of two eternal things: Love and Sorrow.

He sat very still thinking. The pity of it all took hold of his heart and an impulsive longing rose in him to do something to set things aright as they should be, for this beautiful child. Yet the sins of the fathers! Who can pay for them but the flesh and blood of those who made the debt? Who can set aright what has been wrong from the first? What place in the world was there for this love flower of the desert?

Supposing he, Wilberforce St. John Carden were to marry her! The tingle came into his veins again at the thought, and a song sang in his blood. But his brain knew that it was a fool's idea. What place in his life for the simple untaught child?

It never occurred to him to doubt whether she would marry him. He was too trained a student in the school of women's looks not to know what gift she had given him with her eyes whether consciously or unconsciously, at their first encounter. And every instinct urged him to lay hot impulsive hands on it, to take and keep it, as he had taken and kept her hand. But his brain remained cool and clear. He had his code to keep. The girl was impossible to marry. That fact put her out of his reach definitely.

He sighed deeply. He did not know that he sighed, but the girl heard him. It seemed to him that he had come a long way, and passed through some extraordinarily poignant ordeal. As a matter of fact it was only a minute or two since she had last spoken that the girl spoke again, continuing her narrative.

"My mother lived in this house with her Boer husband who was very cruel to her. The only pleasure she had was to sit here sometimes and watch the road. One day when her husband was away in the Transvaal an Irishman came along the road. He was a hunter and an adventurer, and my mother said there was a magic in him that no woman could resist—unless *she were of his own country;* for all others he was one of those who *must* be followed when they call, and I think he must have been, for one so sweet and good as my mother to have forgotten all for him. He took her away to his waggons, and they were going away together to the Interior but a lion killed him over there by the river."

"What was his name?" asked Carden, though he already knew. He knew now whose musical voice had echoed up old memories when first he heard her speak.

"Francis Kavanagh. My mother told me

when she was dying, but no one else has ever known, except Grietje—and now you."

"Why do you tell me?" he asked, though he knew the answer to that too. Perhaps she did not hear, for she gave no response, only made a little foot-note to her tragic tale.

"She made me swear a solemn promise, by her sin and his." A moment later she added:

"But I can never help being glad that I am not the child of a Boer."

"Yet you have stayed on? You still live with the Boer who was so cruel to your mother?" Somehow it was difficult to reconcile this strange fact with her, but doubtless she could explain. She could.

"I do not. He is long ago dead. I live here with Johannes de Beer my husband."

It seemed to Carden that the night changed and turned cold. The stars looked faint and dim, and the moonlight that had been so beautiful erstwhile grew a strange dull grey, the colour of death.

He too felt cold, and old. All the fatigue of the day descended upon him in a heavy cloud, and he suddenly had a great longing for sleep and forgetfulness.

"Ah, yes—your husband," he said in a vague way, like a man whose thoughts are elsewhere.

"He used to pass this way often with his waggons, and my mother thought he would make me a good husband. When she was dying and I had no one in the world he promised her to marry me and take care of me. I try to mind him well, and he is not unkind."

Later she said:

"He bought this farm and came to live here because it has always been my home—and I like to watch the road."

He did not ask her why. The boys by the fire got up and shuffled away to their blankets. The old woman was long since gone. These two were left alone in the silence and the moonlight.

"Did you think that someone for you would come along the road some day?" he asked at last, coming very near her and looking at her mouth. After a moment she answered with a little sobbing sigh in her throat:

"But I must always remember the promise I made to my mother."

He came close to her and gripped her hands; his eyes full of hunger, and longing, and caresses searched hers; his lips were almost on her lips.

"*What was the promise?*"

A wave of colour passed over her face and her eyes darkened with tears.

"I think you know," she cried miserably.

"You must break it," he said firmly. "You are mine—you must come with me."

"No," she said crying, "I cannot."

Her face bright and pale in the white light was like the face of a brave boy looking on death. The heat and madness went out of Carden. He took her hand very gently and kissed it, then he walked away into the night.

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But out on the hot scented veld he thought of the gifts in her eyes and madness came upon him again. A promise! Can the dead bind the living with promises? Can a sinner make a saint out of her child by laying an injunction on her young soul! He laughed loud and bitterly in the night, and the birds stirred in the trees at so strange a sound. A "bush baby" curled in some distant clump of mimosa began to wail, and the dog that had followed his master from the farm whined uneasily. He had walked far and long. The swift rush of the river was close at hand, and the whereabouts of the farm could only be guessed by one little faint yellow light that streaked across the distance. Someone was keeping vigil.

Somewhere near this spot Kavanagh had met

the end so fitting to his wild adventurous life. *Who lives by the sword shall die by the sword!* The lawless had fallen victim to the lawless! But he had found his own before the end came, was Carden's thought.

What did Death matter when one had drunk to the dregs the cup Life holds to the lips of lovers? A good enough way to die too, by God! A short sharp struggle with the odds against him—then, very swiftly, the end!

Married to a Boer! Those dewy dreaming eyes that were of his land—that black hair that winged above her forehead like the wings of a raven—that ardent spirit that had leaped from her eyes to his—married to a Boer! And he, Wilberforce Carden, who had always taken what he wanted from life, wrenched it from men's hands and women's lips, *he* must be denied and go empty away!

He forgot now that when he thought her free he had successfully resisted the idea of marrying her as a solution to the problem, and forgot too that her accent jarred on him. Remembered only the gifts her eyes had for him—and thought that with her, out under the stars he could forget the world into which she would not fit. And it was no good. She was married to a Boer!

Raging he bit on the empty pipe in his mouth, and blood came into his eyes so that he could no longer see clearly, but went stumbling on his way, raging, cursing. He would have liked to have that Boer who was "not unkind" to her under his hands out there in the veld. He flung himself like a boy face down on the earth. After a little while, lying there, a quietness fell upon him. The cool brain that had out-finessed many another cool brain woke up and began to consider the situation from the point of view of the man who does not mean to lose, whatever the game may be. He lay so still that his dog who sat uneasily by him thought he must be asleep and from time to time gently licked his ear. But Dark Carden was not asleep. He was fighting a battle with his better self; with such rags and remnants of a conscience as survived in him; with a last unbroken moral code. At last he got up and retraced his steps quietly and firmly like a man with a purpose. His eyes had grown a little harder. The battle was lost.

Dawn was not more than an hour or two off when he returned to the farm. The stars were darkening, and the indescribable freshness of morning could be felt in the air. Shadows under tree and bush were stirring as if for flight. A

wedge-shaped flock of wild duck passed, honking mournfully, towards the east.

The light in the farmhouse had gone out; but as he came quietly to the stoep he heard from a window that stood ajar a sound as of a woman softly and brokenly weeping. A little while he stood there, listening, then gently he pushed the window further open and stepped into the room. The soft and broken weeping ceased.

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They stayed three days and nights at Grey-Kopje farm. Talfourd and Carden went out shooting daily, returning at meal times, laden with small game to restock the larder. Always after dinner the three sat on the stoep as on the first night, and Talfourd sang while the other two listened. Swartz had brought back fresh horses on the evening of the first day, but Carden found fault with them and made him return for others. On the second day, a native carrier sent out with instructions to search the road for Carden brought a letter from the men waiting in Tuli who wanted to know what delayed him and why he did not materialise? Talfourd wanted to know too, but knew better than to ask. Carden was a man who took badly to any kind of ill-timed inquiry.

On the fourth morning, Swartz had not returned,

but Talfourd with the clear eye of a man who has accomplished nine hours of sound sleep with nothing on his conscience, glanced out of the window and noted Carden picking out of the cart things he would not be likely to need before reaching Tuli. "Hurray! we're going to make a move at last!" he said to himself, and made haste to perform his toilette.

At the breakfast table, it struck him that Carden looked older than a man of thirty-four ought to look, however swift has been the pace. However, he kept his observations to himself. It transpired that Carden's plan was that he and Talfourd should start for Webb's immediately after breakfast, leaving the cart to be brought on later by Swartz when he turned up with horses.

"If we don't meet him we can send on someone else for it."

"How are we going to get there?" said Talfourd looking up in surprise.

"I suppose we can foot thirty miles without endangering our lives?" answered Carden with something so very like a sneer and so very unlike his usual impassive serenity that Talfourd was even more surprised.

"Oh, all right, my dear fellow," he said pleas-

antly. "It's your picnic. I only wanted to know."

Mrs. de Beer sat listening without comment, but she grew very pale. Afterwards Talfourd went out to get the guns ready, and Carden remained sitting at the table.

"You are going?" she said looking away from him with eyes that were no longer dewy but dry and brilliant like the sky above the Karoo in days of drought.

"Yes," he answered in a business-like voice. "I must go." He got up and looked out of the window for a moment, then walked back to the table.

"My friends are waiting for me at Tuli."

"Yes," she said.

"I cannot break faith with them."

"No." Her mouth was twisted like the mouth of a tortured child, but her eyes remained bright and dry.

Carden's faithless heart smote him.

"For God's sake, Frances—" he muttered, taking her hands. "I will stay if you wish it"—But his heart was already away with his friends and the waiting miles beyond. She read the truth in his eyes. No word *now* of her coming with him! Only of his staying—if she wished it!

She looked into his eyes a long aching moment, then turned away with one word:

"Good-bye."

A few hours later all was as it had been at the Grey farm. Even the cart was gone, for Swartz had brought four sturdy mules and driven it away. Under the lone tree Xsosa, the baboon, sat silent, watching the kopjes with fierce wistful eyes. Silence everywhere, except in one room of the house whence came the sound as of a woman softly and brokenly weeping.

Once some Kaffir words spoken savagely yet with a kind of crooning tenderness came through an open window.

"See you now what you have got from watching the road!—a knife in your heart. Did not old Grietje warn you? Hush arme *kindje*—weep not."

But the soft and broken weeping went on.

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Across the arid flats of Bechuanaland went Carden with company picked for its excellence in fair weather or foul; but sometimes on the fairest, fullest day a pang of loneliness would shoot through him, darkening his mental horizon and isolating him from his fellows. The Forest of Somabula gave splendid sport, but in its deep

silences he sometimes thought he could hear the sound of a woman weeping. And all the water sweeping down the violet black precipices of Victoria Falls and twirling lazily in the subtle olive green pool below could not wash out the remembrance of a mouth that was twisted like the mouth of a little tortured child. But his conscience had great sleeping qualities. Also, he had not been using his will for ten years to fight and "down" other men without strengthening its sinews for his own service. He *willed* not to remember certain things, therefore in time will knocked memory out, or at least put it into Chancery where it could no longer hurt him until he released it, or it proved strong enough to release itself.

After that the trip was as complete a success for him, as it had been from the beginning to the others.

Everything favoured them. Sport was extraordinarily good, boys reliable, mules and oxen in fine condition, weather unfailingly serene. The objective point of the trip was Lake Rudolph in British East Africa, via British Central and German territory. The route had been picked and pored over long before the start and nothing intervened to spoil the original plans. With an

almost uncanny smoothness the days unclosed, rolled themselves out, and closed again, full to the brim with event and adventure, leaving no spare moment in which to remember the life left hundreds of miles behind; thereafter swiftly transforming themselves into weeks and months, until more than half the year was done.

Then one lovely moonlight night on the shore of Lake Bangwelo memory without comprehensible rhyme or reason came out of Chancery and stayed with Carden. And thereafter it came regularly. Will had no power over it any longer. Like a little spectral child that was afraid to be out alone it came oftenest when the moon was sinking and the dawn only an hour or two off. Nearly always its lips were twisted with pain, and on dark nights he could hear it softly weeping. But there were nights when it was not a sad ghost and these were hardest to bear. Sometimes it threw a soft warm arm round his throat and woke him very tenderly because the dawn was near and he must go. At other times it would leave a kiss fresh as a flower across his lips and he would fling out his arms and wake with a curse to find them empty. But always in some wise or another the little ghost kept vigil with him.

Then slowly, little by little, he began to hate

things, and things repaid him as they always do, by going wrong. Boys began to run away when they were most needed, donkeys took to dying (the ox-waggons had long been left behind), carriers got fever and died, and those engaged in their place ofttimes scooted leaving packs by the wayside. Big game, after long tracking, escaped though wounded, in the end. One of the other fellows went down with malaria and passed out. The rest of them grew morose and sick of the whole business. Some of them began to talk of the affairs that awaited their attention down country. But Carden meant to bring back a white rhino from the shores of the Rudolph and he said so, though God knew that he too was sick of the business. Not a night now that he did not lie down with maledictions in his heart; not a morning when he rose to a world glittering with frost crystals that looked as though they had been shaken from some giant Christmas card (everywhere except on the dark spots where sleepers had lain) but his first thought was to curse the day he was born and jibe at every good thing life had bestowed on him.

The year was two months short of completion when the other men began to drop off. Le Breton and Senier took a dozen boys and walked

for Mozambique. Vincent was dead. Talfourd, the last to go, joined at Tabora another man who was making his way to Daar-es-Saalem. Carden was left alone with his determination to finish at Lake Rudolph or die in the attempt. The determination was undermined at nights by a spectre which whispered him alluring invitations to embark at Mombassa for the Cape and thence from Petersburg to take the Tuli road. But by day he was far from the intention of doing anything of the kind, though after being away nearly a year and a half he had very good reasons for hastening his return. Occasional batches of letters that reached him at prearranged posts notified an urgency for his presence on the Rand, but it had grown to be a matter almost of defiance now that he should make Rudolph, though who or what it was he defied he omitted to specify, even to himself.

And he *did* make Rudolph though it took him three months to do it and another three months to get back. When he arrived at Mombassa with his white rhino trophies, he was looking a good deal the worse for wear, and it may be computed that his system contained more than one man's fair share of malarial and tropical trypanosomes. But he was once more immune to

spectral memories at least and so far master of his destiny as to be able with a firm mind to arrange his affairs down south by letter and cable and take ship for Europe instead of the Cape. Via the East Coast he reached Egypt and made a month's stay; then to Marseilles and several months loitering on the Mediterranean shores. But his objective point now was Ireland and by land and water he came at last to that fair, green land. For one of the conclusions he had arrived at during the lonely later months of his expedition was that man was not meant to live alone and that the hour had struck for him to find the beautiful, accomplished, and well-born girl who doubtless awaited him somewhere in his own country. Ireland indeed is the home of many such, and in and out of Dublin during a specially gay dancing and hunting season he found no scarcity of the usual supply. But none were for him. Always, even in the most charming, something lacked, some little, vital, essential thing—he knew not what, and did not wish to analyse, and never stayed to find out. Once or twice, when he lingered in curiosity, the keys of his castle were almost out of his hands, for the dark face of Dark Carden had not lost its lure for women, and many a beautiful eye grew brighter for his coming and more than

one society beauty made up her mind that it would be "rather good fun" to go to South Africa as this adventurer's bride. But Carden escaped always, and with a sense of breathlessness and relief that was extraordinary considering the nature of his quest.

Then one bleak morning in late autumn the nostalgia of Africa took him by the heart and before that day was out he was shaking the dust of Ireland from his feet with his face set for Southampton where the Union-Castle liners turn their noses towards the Southern Cross.

One of the first faces to greet him at the Cape Town Docks was Talfourd's. Carden fell upon him as upon a long-lost brother. It seemed to him there was no other man in the world he would so gladly have met. He was conscious that Tal and he shared an experience that was secret to the rest of his friends. Wherefore he could not disguise his pleasure at the encounter. Tal was hooked in to come and lunch at the City Club, and later to dine at the Mount Nelson. For the moment there was no one like Tal. The latter indeed found himself somewhat intrigued by this unwonted demonstrativeness. Carden seemed to him to be queerly changed since first they had met some five or six years past. When after dinner

that night, out among the trim walks and aromatic bushes of the garden, they fell into reminiscences he voiced something of his thought. He was an introspective fellow with a good deal of sentiment in his composition, and the wine and cigars had been excellent.

"You were always a hard nut to crack, Carden, but the gayest chap on earth, and even the fellows you knocked out liked you for it afterwards. But Africa changed you as it changes us all. You went queer on that trek of ours up north and I never could make it out. I've thought a lot about it and, do you know, I always dated the change in you back to that little farm we put up at on the road to Tuli—*Greis-Kopje*—remember the place?"

Carden gloomed at him. Did he remember it? By God!

"Strange," continued Talfourd, "I ran into our old driver Swartz at Pretoria the other day. He has got regular work on the Zeederburg Coach Line, and is up and down the Tuli Road. He told me a queer thing about *Greis-Kopje*. It appears that old de Beer, the fellow who owned the place, disappeared about a year ago and has never been seen since. He was the husband of that pretty girl we thought was his daughter at first. You remember?"

Carden was busy lighting another cigar, his face mask-like except for the eyes which burnt like points of blue fire.

"The supposition is that either he was drowned crossing the Crocodile River or else a stray lion got him."

"And Mrs. de Beer?"

"Still lives on there with old Grietje and Yacop."

"Let's go in," said Carden abruptly. "I have to be up at daybreak and get through a lot of business. I leave by the mail at eleven."

"What a fellow you are! Where for? Johannesburg?"

"Yes." And from thence to the Tuli Road, fast as hoof and wheel could carry him. Now he knew what ailed him, and would shout it from the mountain-tops but that it was too sweet and dear a secret to be shared with all the world—*yet.* Now he knew what anodyne to seek for healing of his raging wound, what drink for solace of his burning torment. By the broad, dusty road to Tuli ran a stream of clear, cold water and his parched soul was sick to drink from it. Memory suddenly sculptured in his brain a face that all Ireland had not been able to duplicate. Yet all Ireland lay in the dewy, passionate eyes of Frances de Beer, and for him all home, all peace, all future.

Now, at last, he acknowledged what he had always known, and gave himself up to the thought of what he had denied so long: she who had given all asked nothing, and let him go without a reproach. He knew now that he had been a knave and a fool and that for the last two and a half years he had been paying with torment of body and soul for it. And still was paying. When he remembered her and all she had been to him—his loneliness was a still small torment that pierced and tortured him like a dart in his vitals.

Throughout that night he paced his room, or stood at his open window, staring out at the silvered slopes of Table Mountain but getting no peace of her stern eternal loveliness. Pacing, and staring, in the small hours, he went over every detail of that brief sweet-madness on the Tuli Road, remembering her face, her voice, her eyes, and the soul of her that had leaped from them to him. And, as always, the thing that stirred him most was the memory of her fluttering hand under his that first night when they sat on the stoep listening to Talfourd's singing. He remembered how a mist had come over his eyes at the feel of it; his heart had seemed to turn over in his breast; it was as though he had trapped something he had lain in wait for all his life; all the

tyranny and tenderness of his nature had been roused in that moment, with something of a boy's elation when he has caught with his own hands some beautiful wild thing that he has watched for long.

It all came back, like a dream of delirium, only more vividly. He re-lived the moment when a passing chivalrous impulse had bade him kiss her hands and leave her, and that dark hour on the veld when he had fought a battle with his baser self and lost. Then that other mad hour of stolen sweetness, when he had groped for her in the luminous darkness of her room and found first the little, pale, strong hands that smelled like apple blossom—then her lips! He recalled her tears and little broken cries, and how his lips had crushed them down and kissed them away! How all too soon the dawn had come! And with this memory came pain and shame. Bitter shame that he had so debased her whom he loved. She who had only wished to do right, but found her heart and his will too strong for her. Love anointed his cynical eyes at last and he saw and understood the hearts of women as he had never done before, and knew at last how unworthy were most men, and he with them, of the sacrifices women make on the altar of love. Hot, un-

accustomed moisture that seemed to be dragged torturingly from the very depths of his being seared his eyes. He flung himself on his bed, ashamed at first of his tears, then of his acts, and, at last, ashamed of his life.

"God forgive me!" he thought. "It shall never happen again."

But God's forgiveness was taken for granted and he thought less about that than of the sweetness the future promised.

It was not many nights before his feet were set upon the long white dusty road that wound by kop and kloof and vlei to the haven of his heart's desire. He had given orders for everything he possessed on the Rand to be sold, and did not mean to return to the Golden City. Waggons were being fitted up and provisioned in Pretoria for his use, and would follow him. For the veld was to be his home now once and for all. He was sick of money-making, politics, and all the little games and intrigues of finance, of artificial women, and conventions. He meant to have done with these things and forget on the brown, kind breast of Mother Africa that he had ever known them.

And *she* was coming with him; the one woman who fitted into the wild places his soul loved; the woman with dreams of stretching plains and forests

in her eyes. Ah! that was a woman with whom to seek the blue mountains, to camp under the stars and forget cities and sins! It was well that old de Beer had disappeared, for Dark Carden meant to take what was his own at last, and swore that all the de Beers in the world, dead or alive, should not prevent him. He was ready to defy Heaven and Hell to prevent him.

. . . . . .

His cart drew near the line of grey kopjes at the end of a long day's run. From his outspan the distance was too great for any but his own keen eyes to distinguish the little ramshackle farm.

Everything was as it had been nearly two and a half years before. The dust lay thick on the sage-green bush, and once more a blood-red sun was sinking to rest behind the horizon of massed scarlet and bronze. No one had mended the broken-down kraal, and on a far off rise a figure that might have been Yacop was picking up dried cow-dung. There was something very like the smell of roasting coffee on the air.

Carden was glad to be alive with a fierce gladness. He felt a boy again, and looked it, as he strode across the sunburnt grass. Yes! there was Grietje crouching by the fire. And a white gown

flickered on the stoep as long ago it had flickered a signal to his heart. She was waiting for him there, as he had always known that she would be waiting.

The baboon barked furiously as he approached. It was not chained to the tree any longer, but to a post by the side of the house. At the sound of the creature's hoarse voice the old woman by the fire rose up. She did not speak when she saw that it was Carden, only looked at him with strange little old eyes, dark as the unexplored depths of a secret well. When he had passed she stood a moment gazing after him, then shuffled silently away to the back of the house.

He went forward to the stoep and slowly mounted the crumbling stone steps. The old woman's gaze had vaguely disturbed him. Or was it something in the motionless silence of the woman who sat gravely observing him, that chilled the riot of his veins?

She wore her little sunbonnet cappie as of old, her face so far back in it that nothing could be seen but two great eyes. It seemed strange to him that she did not rise, nor put out her hand in welcome. Only sat there observing him sombrely.

"Frances," he said gently, "I have come back."

She sighed. After a moment she spoke from her cappie. But it was not a voice that he remembered at all.

"You should not have done that, Dark Carden."

He stood very still. It seemed as if something ice cold had entered his breast and was slowly approaching his heart. His voice jerked a little when he spoke again, very humbly.

"I should have come long ago."

"Yes; you should have come long ago." There was something relentless and fateful in the sound of that voice, so soft and stern. "Now, it is too late."

"No," he said violently. "It is not. I have come to take you away and never let you go again. I cannot do without you any longer."

She gave one of her strange terrible sighs, and spite of his firm words he felt the cold thing creep a little nearer to his heart.

"Where is your husband, Frances?" God knew what made him ask. He cared little enough for the whereabouts of old de Beer. Yet the answer was extraordinarily disconcerting.

"He is over there." She made a gesture and he jerked his head round abruptly. There was nothing to be seen in the direction her hand had indicated. Nothing but the lonely tree. He

looked at her piercingly then, with a new inquiry in his glance, and a creeping, clutching fear for her mind.

"I heard that he was dead," he said slowly.

"Yes, it is true. He is dead," she answered quietly, looking past him to where she had pointed. Spite of himself he looked once more in the same direction. Again nothing but the tree.

But something else arrested his eye. Grietje had come back and was squatting by the fire, and at her side, playing in the dust, was the toddling dumpy figure of a little child. It must have come round with Grietje from the back of the house. Certainly it had not been there before.

"Whose child is that?" he asked in surprise. And the stern, still voice from the sunbonnet answered him:

"It is your child and mine."

"My God!"

After a long time he said again, brokenly, with bitter self-accusation.

"My God! Frances, forgive me! I did not know. How was I to know?"

She did not answer.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"Yes, as I hope for forgiveness," she said.

There was a dull solemnity in her tone and she did not touch the hand he stretched out. Unobserved by him the little toddling child had come up and now flung itself against its mother's knees hiding its face in her lap. It swung a little sunbonnet in its hand and by the fading light he could see the softly curling hair, black as his own, and the outline of a small tender face. He knew that her child and his could not but be beautiful, and stood staring there, trembling, the magic of fatherhood on him and an urgent longing to catch the little creature in his arms. Suddenly it turned to him, and in the same moment the mother raised a pale, warning finger and laid it across her lips in token that he must be silent. So he did not cry out at what he saw.

The little face that promised such flower-like beauty had been transformed into a thing of horror by a piece of diabolically clever tattooing. A monstrous purple and red spider sprawled its bloated form and lobster-like claws upon the delicate rose-leaf skin. Neither tarantula nor octopus, it possessed all the worst attributes of each. It's puffed-out body crouched in the centre of the face upon the nose and cheek bones, and the child's bright violet eyes seemed the staring strange eyes of the beast. Its claws

sprayed and curled about the mouth, reached out to the ears, and lost themselves in tendrils of hair upon the forehead! The thing seemed too hideous in conception to be the work of anyone but a mad devil, yet there was in it some sinister suggestion of human hands.

Carden knew not what supernatural or other power kept him there, staring with agonised eyes at the face of his child, when his every instinct was to turn and run as he had never run from anything in his life. The child broke the spell by dancing away with a pretty elfin laugh to rejoin Grietje by the fire. The quality of her laugh and the light patter of her feet brought home to Carden the realisation that it was a girl whose beauty had been thus cruelly destroyed forever, and a groan broke from him. The woman watching him with her tragic eyes saw sweat standing in little beads on his lips.

"*He did it,*" she said. "*That is why he lies dead over there.*" Her eyes travelled past Carden once more to where the lonely tree waved an arm in the evening breeze.

"He did not come back for eleven months after you had passed," she continued in her sad relentless voice. "My baby was here when he returned —so of course he knew. But he said nothing.

I feared terribly for the child at first, but in the end I came to think that he did not care. Then, one day, when my fears were all asleep, he disappeared, taking my baby with him for three days. Grietje and I roamed the veld seeking them, and on the night of the third day as we drew near home again we heard the child crying, and coming in we found it with its lovely little face all swollen and black from the poisons he had put in. He was lying on the bench laughing, and called out to me as I came in:

"'There is your love child. But *she* will have to do without love.'"

"I was worn out with weeping and wandering for three days and nights, but when he said those words I rushed over to him and killed him. I killed him with these hands." She looked down on the hands lying on her lap.

"I tore his throat open and his life ran out with his blood," she said softly.

Carden had no words. He stood looking at the little pale strong hands that were used to smell of apple blossom, and listening like a man in a dream. But it was a bad dream. A nightmare that would haunt him for the rest of his days! He was not sure now that those days would be many, that *his* life too was not

passing with every word spoken by that gentle, fateful voice.

"Grietje and I buried him over there under the tree. No one else knows but Xsosa who watched us at the burying in the dead of night."

Darkness had suddenly enfolded the land. No stars brightened the vapouring gloom but occasionally the fire threw out a blood-red finger showing Grietje cuddling the child to her bosom, crooning some Kaffir lullaby over its head.

"What is to be done," muttered Carden, in the voice of a man who has come to the end of all ways. He looked at her, but her face was, as ever, hidden in the cappie. He had not seen it once in all this terrible hour and now he knew he would never see it.

"What is there to do?" she said sombrely. "Grietje and I must stay here, with him, until we grow old and die."

"But . . . the child?"

"Ah!" She sighed her deep sigh. "She will grow up perhaps—and in her turn watch the road."

The Mollmeit of the Mountain

The Mollmeit[1] of the Mountain

WHEN the number of coloured pupils attending the Friend for Little Children School reached one hundred and fifty, it was decided that Sister Joanna ought to have the assistance of a white pupil-teacher as well as the three half-caste young girls she had already trained. The several High-Dutch ladies of Brandersberg who interested themselves in Sister Joanna's good work, both by collecting subscriptions for it abroad and helping to place the young girls in domestic service after they had left school, determined to advertise in the Free State newspapers for a girl who would not only teach in the school, but also live with Sister Joanna at the school cottage, and help with the simple domestic arrangements. For Sister Joanna kept no servant; she would have considered it extravagant to do so while she had health and strength; besides, she had lived so long

[1] Dutch for madwoman or witch.

in the Colony that there was nothing in the way of domestic and everyday housework she was not able for. She was a good cook, could make her own soap, smoke her own legs of mutton, and grow her own vegetables. She had a neat little garden round the cottage (which stood some hundred and fifty yards from the school), and a corner of it was devoted to herbs, for she was deeply learned in the science of herbal healing, and could cure a headache, a varicose vein, a black eye, or supply you with a sleeping draught that would make you forget you had ever known neuralgia; all out of one little corner of her garden. Besides this, she managed with great skill and discipline the large school of coloured boys and girls which she had started herself with half a dozen children, some fifteen or sixteen years before; and yet found time to tend the sick, harass the lazy, and manage the affairs generally of everyone in the native Location. However, though she would not admit it, she was beginning to look old and worn, and it was certainly a good idea to get someone to help her in her busy life.

The advertisement brought several answers, but none of them so satisfactory as that of a young Bloemhof girl called Mary Russel. Mary it seemed had not only received a good education

and passed her "Matric" (a rather unusual thing in a girl of seventeen), but being the eldest of a large and not at all wealthy family was also extremely domesticated. The Brandersberg ladies thought well of her letter of application, and better still of Mary herself when she arrived, pretty and fresh and kind, with a firm mouth and a courageous glance in her grey eyes. Though of English extraction she was colonial born, a further qualification for the place, for Colonials though kind and just do not spoil natives by making too much of them as English people are apt to do. No sooner was Mary Russel installed than she became a great favourite with the children, and the Brandersberg ladies feeling that they had done well by so popular a character as Sister Joanna thereafter turned their attention to their own affairs. The large and flourishing town of Brandersberg lay within the shadow of a mighty *berg* that in any other country would be called a mountain, and that even in Africa was considered worthy of a title. Thaba Inkosisan it was called, and when the sun set, its great jagged shadow was flung far across the veld, just missing Brandersberg, but falling full and black upon the native Location; and this was considered a curious and sinister thing by the coloured population, for it

was upon their village and in their hearts that the mountain had cast sorrow and fear.

The Friend for Little Children School was close at the foot of the *berg*, and a road ran direct from it to the Location, so that the children could go to and fro between their homes and the school without approaching the Dutch town; and perhaps this was one of the reasons why Sister Joanna's work was as popular with the whites as with the natives, for in the Free State the whites did not care for their children to mix with the natives, and any arrangement to keep the two races apart was greatly favoured. But the situation of the school was a cause of inquietude amongst the coloured parents; not because it was too far from the town, but because it was too near the *berg*. For Thaba Inkosisan was haunted by a mollmeit, and a mollmeit is no friend to little children.

The haunting of the mountain dated from many years back. When Mary Russel heard the story, she knew that the horrible tragedy in which it originated must have occurred about the time she was born, for it was in that year that the Basutoes fought in the Free State, surrounding and putting many a town into a state of siege. Brandersberg had been among the beleaguered towns, and the

inhabitants of several farms near by had been put to the assegai by the fierce Basuto warriors.

Now, on the other side of the mountain, about thirty miles from the town, there had stood a little stone farmhouse which an old Boer had built with an eye to defence in case of war. Its windows were small and high, its doors and shutters of iron, and there was nothing inflammable anywhere in its outer structure. When the Boer died, the place was bought by an Englishman with a pretty wife and little daughter. Just before the trouble with the Basutoes, another woman came to supplement the little family, a certain Janet Fink, middle-aged, well-educated, and recently arrived in Africa on an emigrant ship. She had been engaged by an agent at the Cape to come to the farm as a sort of combined nursery governess and mother's Help. The people of Brandersberg who knew the Englishman and his wife and liked them, had not had time to make the acquaintance of the Help before the war with the natives broke out and the town went into *laager*. Unfortunately this family was one of those cut off from the town. The Englishman had indeed been warned, but he pooh-poohed the idea of war, or only heeded it enough to postpone going in as usual to the town to get the monthly supply of provisions. But

eventually supplies ran so low that he was obliged one day to set forth after giving careful instructions for the defence of the farm in case of attack. He had, however, delayed too long, and on his way into the town he was met by the Basutoes out for killing, and put to the assegai. A contingent of the main *impi* then went to the farmhouse and tried to take it, but the women had seen them coming, and received them so resolutely, and with such well-aimed shots from the high windows that having more important things on hand than the taking of two women they presently proceeded on their way, leaving two men behind with instructions to watch the house and kill the women if possible; if not, to starve them out. Being well informed (as Kaffirs always are at such times), they were aware that though there was water in the house there was no meat or meal to speak of, and that the little garrison could not hold out for more than a few days. It held out, however, for ten days, during which time smoke went up every morning from the chimney, and whenever the Basutoes made a feint of approaching they were received with rifle fire. On the eleventh day, however, there was no smoke, and towards evening the two Basutoes feeling pretty sure of their prey crept close, meaning to try for the chimney.

Within ten yards of the house one of them was picked off with a bullet through his head, and the other turning to run got a shot in his leg that put him out of business, but in spite of which he managed to crawl away into the bush, where a day or two later he was found by a troop of Dutch Artillery. Under the lash of the *sjambok* he was induced to tell all he knew about the farmhouse, and the Dutchmen, at length convinced that the place was not an ambush but really contained the two white women and child, rode up to it and found, not what they expected, but many surprising things. First of all, instead of signs of famine there was every evidence that many meals had been eaten; plates with remains of meat and gravy were scattered about, and a saucepan contained the leavings of a stew that had been curried and flavoured with onions. Plainly fuel had given out, for every wooden thing in the scantily furnished kitchen had been chopped up and burned. The Boers were deeply puzzled until in an adjoining room the body of the farmer's wife was found lying in a corner covered with old sacks. She had been dead for many days, and the manner of her dying was swift and sudden; there was a knife deeply imbedded in her back. When later the charred skull and thigh bones of a

little child were raked out of the ashes in the fireplace the dark tragedy was made clearer still, and the rough men turned from the scene with sick hearts and grim mouths. There were husbands and fathers amongst them, and it would have gone hard with her if in that hour they had come across the mother's Help who in so hideous a fashion had helped herself. But they never found her. Whether after escaping from the house she was caught and killed by the Basutoes, or, lost in the bush had been eaten by wild beasts, or wandering on had reached some town and under an assumed name told a plausible tale and been taken in and cared for, had never been discovered. Only, presently in some strange way a story got about that she had fled to Thaba Inkosisan, and was living there in a cave, subsisting on wild roots and rock rabbits.

The tale first got credence among others besides the natives on the disappearance from some transport waggons outspanned near the mountain of a little Kaffir child. It was declared by the Kaffirs that the "flesh-eating woman" from the farm had turned into a mollmeit with cravings for human flesh, and that the children of Brandersberg would never be safe again while she lived in the mountain. Mollmeits, according to them,

were like tigers which having once tasted human blood find no other so much to their liking; and, though other food must of needs be eaten, the evil craving comes upon them at times like a madness and must be satisfied. Most of the Dutch people scoffed at this ghoulish tale, saying that it was more likely that the Kaffir child had fallen down a ravine, and thereafter been eaten by jackals. But some there were who believed in the mollmeit theory, and spoke of searching the mountain. However, the idea came to nothing. There are too many little *piccannins* in Africa for one more or less to make any difference except to its mother; and the sorrows of a Kaffir woman do not count for much in some parts of the world. Moreover, the searching of Thaba Inkosisan was not an affair to be lightly undertaken; its sides were steep and rough, with great inaccessible cliffs in some parts, and masses of bush growing thick and close as moss. There were known to be caves too, and cracks and fissures that led far into the mountain-side; but the notion of anyone living in such places seemed to the Dutch impracticable and ridiculous. At any rate, nothing was done, and with the passing of months and years, the legend of the mollmeit had almost died out when another child disappeared—a little orphan this time, whom no one

missed at first because it was no one's business to look after her; thus some days passed before her loss was realised and then it seemed rather late to make more than a perfunctory search, for if she was lost in the bush (and it must be remembered that the bush grows right up to the outskirts of many South African towns) she was probably already dead from starvation or sunstroke. A search was made in a half-hearted sort of way, and mainly because Sister Joanna agitated for it; but no one bothered for long about a little half-caste orphan child. Besides, the coloured people, whom the matter mostly concerned, said that it was no use looking for what was already eaten and digested up in the caves of Thaba Inkosisan; which clearly showed what their solution of the problem was.

It was long before the mollmeit was heard of again. True, the superstitious and fearful tried to make out that little Anna Blaine, the youngest of a large coloured family, had fallen a victim to the witch; but to all sensible people it was plain that the child had been drowned at the Sunday-school picnic. She was not missed until the children got home, and then it was remembered that when last seen she was throwing stones into the *spruit* swollen with recent rains

near whose banks the picnic had been held. Sister Joanna, with whom the child had been a special favourite, worried the police until they consented to drag the *spruit* for some six miles; but the body was never recovered.

The fourth disappearance created more stir than any of the others. For one thing it *was* the fourth, and when four children have mysteriously disappeared within the space of fourteen years it is time to be up and doing, said both the Dutch and the coloured population of Brandersberg. Further, it was no orphan or unwanted child this time, but Susie Brown, the pet child of a highly respectable coloured carpenter. The little thing had started for school one morning, and had just simply never arrived. From the time she set out, an hour late, on the long empty road that skirted the foot of the *berg* no one had seen her. It was as though some great *asvogel* had swooped down from the skies and carried her off. Indeed some people were inclined to think this the answer to the riddle. Possibly, they said, a great bird of prey had its nest in a secret place of the mountain, and fed its young thus! At any rate it was time for the mountain to be searched and the mystery made an end of. And the mountain *was* searched, from end to end, by a large band of men. It is

true that all the inner crevices could not be explored, nor the highest cliffs, but the searchers were satisfied if others were not, that neither monstrous bird nor human monster occupied Thaba Inkosisan.

So again with the passing of years, the weird legend died away, and at the time of Mary Russel's coming to the school it was almost forgotten, except by loving mothers who warned their children to keep as far away from the mountain as possible, and the children themselves who never wearied of embroidering and embellishing the fearsome tale, handing it on to one another, and sometimes frightening a timid child into a fit with it.

Mary one day in the schoolyard came upon a little group who having finished their tiffin were seated in a ring listening with scared eyes and parted lips to the story (with variations and improvements) of Susie Brown's disappearance.

" . . . and the mollmeit chose her because she had such nice, fat, round arms and legs . . . just like Rosalie Paton's there," announced the historian, and a chubby pale-brown maiden of five gave a howl of terror. Mary sat down and took the child in her arms, roundly scolding the story-teller while she cuddled the soft fuzzy head against her breast. For it must not be supposed

that these little coloured children are not just as sweet and pretty and attractive as white children. Hardly any of the inhabitants of the Brandersberg native Location were real negroes. The negro races mostly live in kraals far from the towns, speaking no language but that of their tribe, and being classed under the general heading of "Kaffirs." The scholars of the Friend for Little Children School were mostly the offspring of pale brown people—"Cape folks" who have long hair and Malay blood in them, and natives of St. Helena, who are also long-haired, but rather dusky; some were of Koranna or Hottentot breed (and these were not beautiful), but many were the children of mixed marriages between "poor whites" and Cape natives, and these were nearly always pretty and charming-looking. The language used generally amongst themselves was a kind of Low-Dutch patois, but all spoke English well, and were taught in that language.

Little Rosalie Paton's mother was a Cape woman, and a very disreputable one, the drunkard of the village, in fact; but it was probable that the child's father was a white man, for except for the fuzziness of her long black hair and the brilliance of her great dark eyes, she was as like a pretty little white child as she could be.

When Mary had thoroughly scolded the children for talking about the mollmeit, she carried the still weeping Rosalie with her up to the cottage and her own room there. A little petting soon dispersed the tears, and then Mary produced her trinket-box, and allowed the child to look at its contents. A poorly brought-up colonial girl possesses little in the way of jewellery beyond a necklace and bracelet or two made by her own clever fingers from the seeds of the *sponspeck* melon and a few imitation pearls; but Mary had been a favourite wherever she went and had received many little presents. There was a necklace of jagged red corals which her mother had put round her neck as a baby, and that Rosalie gurgled so joyously over that Mary, after a moment's hesitation, clasped it round the little dusky neck and told the child that she might wear it that night at the magic-lantern entertainment. For the Michaelmas holidays were approaching, and Sister Joanna was going to celebrate the break in the school term by giving one of her frequent little entertainments, only this time a new and up-to-date magic lantern, sent by admiring friends across the sea, was to make its *début*, and all the children were wildly excited about it. In the midst of Rosalie's joyful caperings, the voice of Sister Joanna was heard calling:

"Mary, Mary, where are you, my child? Isn't it time for the school bell?" And Mary jumped up guiltily (she had forgotten that the bell was to be rung a quarter of an hour earlier that day), just as Sister appeared in the doorway filling it with her plump, large presence. She was a short woman who in spite of her great activity could not keep down stoutness. Her large round face was pallid with the dead pallor peculiar to people who have lived long in hot climates, but lighted by an unfailing smile of cheerfulness and sky-blue eyes. She wore a quaint garb of black alpaca made in somewhat monk-like fashion, long and full, and confined by a cord at the waist, while on her head was an arrangement that resembled a cross between a coal-scuttle and a Turkish woman's *yashma*. She belonged to no Order, but was an Order unto herself, and made her uniform with her own hands; and if it was a quaint and funny one no one laughed, for Sister Joanna was both liked and respected.

When Mary had told the tale of Rosalie's trouble, Sister burst into her jolly laugh.

"The poor little thing! Was it afraid for its nice little fat brown body," she said tenderly, and taking Rosalie on her knee rolled up the child's cotton sleeves, looked at the plump pale arms, and pinched the soft neck.

"Let me catch any old mollmeit trying to eat my Rosalie!" she said fondly. "Run along, Mary, and ring the bell. Get lessons over early. Tell the children I am letting them off an hour earlier so that they may have time to curl their hair for to-night." She laughed merrily at her own little jest, well knowing that hair curling is an unnecessary item in a coloured child's toilette. She was always full of merry little jokes of this kind, and the natives being a laughter-loving lot rejoiced in them as much as she did.

Mary hurried away leaving Rosalie sitting happily on the old woman's knees, and did not see her again until during the afternoon Sister carried her into the schoolroom fast asleep.

"Oh, Sister! How can you carry that great fat thing! You'll be tired out before to-night," said Mary reproachfully, for she thought Sister looked even paler than usual. And sure enough that night the old lady was too tired to eat any supper before starting for the entertainment. She looked as haggard as death, though her sky-blue eyes were brighter than ever and full of excitement; but the beautifully broiled mutton chop Mary had prepared, with potatoes baked in their skins lay on her plate untouched. Even when Mary made a cup of foamy coffee according

to Sister's own famous receipt it was wasted. Mary, in all the months she had been at the cottage, had never known Sister with anything but an excellent appetite, and was troubled, and before leaving for the school she cut the meat from the uneaten chop and made it into a sandwich, while the potatoes she sliced into a nice salad with a tiny onion chopped over it. This little repast she put on a table in Sister's room. They were simple in their ways at the cottage.

Down at the school, the children were buzzing like bees outside the closed door, while Sister and the pupil-teachers within put the final touches to the magic-lantern arrangements. Mary fished Rosalie out of the crowd, and found that though she was still wearing her torn, school frock, she had been washed, her hair was braided, and she was proudly sporting the coral necklace. She still seemed more than half asleep, but she blinked happily at Mary.

The entertainment was an enormous success. The magic lantern worked like magic indeed, and there were howls of regret when at nine o'clock the last slide was shown. Sister Joanna made an announcement that during holiday week she would give another exhibition for the parents, and the children then danced and partook of the

repast of buns and ginger-beer that kind Sister had provided. They were to go home at half-past nine punctually, but before that time Sister who was very tired left Mary in charge and went home.

"I'll see the children safely off," Mary promised.

"Oh, the children will be all right," said Sister. "It's my lantern and slides I'm thinking about;—pack them safely and put them away in the cupboard, Mary, or sure enough those rapscallions who come to clean up in the morning will be fiddling with them and break something."

Mary promised not to leave until everything was locked up safely, and all the lights put out.

"You needn't worry about anything, Sister. Just get to bed and have a good rest."

Yet when about an hour later she came up the slope to the cottage, she saw by the faint red and purple gleams shining from one of the windows that Sister was still in the Oratory. She felt vexed to think that the old soul was at her prayers instead of being in bed, but knew better than to disturb her; and being very tired herself was not long getting into bed. She went to sleep thinking happily of the coming week of holidays to be spent with her family at Bloemhof. There were only two more days of school, and then on Satur-

day morning she was to leave by a carrier's cart and would reach her home by Saturday afternoon.

During the night, she was much disturbed by the howling of her dog Fingo who was fastened in the yard. She had been allowed to bring Fingo from Bloemhof, and he had always slept in the kitchen, and been allowed the run of the house, but that very afternoon Sister had accused him of rooting in the garden, and insisted on his being kept tied up in future. Whether it was the curtailing of his freedom that desolated Fingo, it is hard to say, but certainly Mary had never before heard him make such tragic and doleful sounds. He at last left off, and she got to sleep, but it seemed only a moment later that she was awakened by a loud thumping on the front door, and sleepily putting out her hand for the matches, she suddenly realised that the light of early dawn was already in the room. Jumping out of bed, she threw a cloak over her nightdress and went to open the door. As she passed through the dining-room, she heard Sister also hurrying out of bed.

"Someone must be ill, Mary," she called through her door, and as if in answer came another loud knocking and a voice crying in bitter trouble.

"Sister Joanna—Oh! Sister Joanna!"

"What, my poor thing? What?" called back the old woman, and came floundering half-dressed from her room as Mary opened the door.

A coloured woman was standing there, haggard and dishevelled, her hair hanging in streaks about her wild face, fear in her bloodshot eyes. Her clothes were rumpled as though they had been slept in, and she was panting and covered with dust. A picture of misery!

"Is my little Rosalie here?" she gasped, and with the question came a sickening odour of stale brandy. It was then they recognised her for Rosalie Paton's mother.

"Here! Why, of course not, Mrs. Paton," cried Mary.

"What do you mean?" said Sister in astonishment.

"*Then the mollmeit's got her,*" wailed the woman distractedly. "*Oh, Jesus! The mollmeit's got my child!*"

"But what do you mean?" repeated Sister in a sterner voice, for she saw that the woman was on the verge of hysteria. "Rosalie went home with all the other children last night, I suppose! Do you mean to say they didn't bring her to you?"

"No!" said the woman, and in her voice was dreadful despair, "God forgive me, Sister,

I was drunk—and asleep—it was not till this morning that I knew she hadn't been home—at least she wasn't in the house—since then I've been to a dozen houses, and no one knows anything, but some of the children say that on their way home they were frightened by something that jumped out from behind a rock down there where the *berg* comes near the road—"

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke in Sister scornfully. "Listening to children's tales! You just go back to the village, Sarah Paton, and look for your child. She's there right enough. Someone has kept her for the night, knowing the state you were in. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, my woman. Be off now and find her, and when you have found her come straight back here and tell me, and see if you can turn over a new leaf after this."

Thus with good-natured scoldings she waved the more than half-comforted woman from the door.

"Get back to your bed, Mary, child, and sleep a little longer. It's not five o'clock yet, and we've earned a little lie-abed after the tiring day yesterday. That child's all right—safely tucked up in some kind soul's bed, you may be sure. It will be a lesson to that good-for-nothing hussy."

But Mary though she went back to bed was too disturbed to sleep. She was haunted by the fear of harm having come to little Rosalie, and could not rid herself of foreboding. Why had she not gone down the road herself with the children? She had indeed watched them for awhile from the school door, and had adjured the elders to take the hands of the little ones and see them all safely to their doors. But well she knew the careless, irresponsible nature of the coloured race! No doubt the little ones had soon been allowed to lag behind. Even so, what harm *could* befall them on that straight road not three quarters of a mile long? Of course the talk of a mollmeit was silly and yet—and yet— Oh! it was no use staying in bed, worrying and fretting. She jumped out and busied herself getting breakfast, making the coffee on a little oil-stove, so that she might have the wood coals for the toast. She then looked into the larder, set the rest of yesterday's milk in soup plates to thicken for dessert at the mid-day meal; put a little more pepper and salt on the neck of mutton that was for dinner, and turned it in its dish, and placed fresh wet cloths round the big lump of butter that must last till the end of the week. By that time, Sister also was dressed, and together according to custom, they went into

the Oratory and said Matins before the small altar. Although she was not a real nun, Sister Joanna never missed saying any of the daily Offices, and at the morning and evening ones Mary always joined her.

It was a nice little Oratory, the floor covered with a soft hand-made rug of red and brown woollen scraps like little autumn leaves, sewn one above the other; several chairs with kneeling-stools before them, and an altar-table that no one would have guessed was made of rough packing-case wood for it was hidden by a scarlet cloth and linen embroidered by the school children, and there were flowers and candles upon it. The many small panes of the one window had been glorified by means of scarlet and purple tissue paper, which cut in sheets and pasted on alternate panes made an excellent substitute for stained glass, and when the sun shone through and fell in a flood of colour upon the patch-work rug, Mary felt a subtle pleasure woven amongst her prayers. Under the window, a large dark oaken chest lent a further air of ecclesiasticism to the little room. It was worm-eaten and full of cracks and holes, but was reputed to have been part of the furniture of a church, and Sister loved it, and kept the altar cloths and holy books in it.

As the two finished their orisons, the sound of voices broke in upon them, followed by a knocking on the door. Once more Sarah Paton stood without, but now several women were with her, and a scattering of children with scared faces and eyes ready to jump out of their heads. There was ill news to tell. Rosalie was not to be found in the village or out of it. No one had seen her since last night, but some of the elder children remembered calling out to her to "Come on" as she loitered sleepily behind. Other smaller children averred that as they were capering along in the rear, "something white" had darted out from behind a rock, and "made noises like a mollmeit." They were quite unable to describe said noises, but declared that they had all run screaming down the road. Evidently in the pleasurable excitement of this adventure sleepy, lagging Rosalie had been forgotten; and no one thought of her again until with the morning came the weeping mother.

"And I tell you the mollmeit's got her," shrieked the unhappy woman once more, while the others gazed apprehensively at Sister Joanna.

"How long is that witch going to be left up in the mountain?" they muttered. "You must write to the Government, Sister. None of our children are safe——"

Sister Joanna did not conceal her impatience with them.

"It is all nonsense and silly superstition," she said. "The child will be found all right. *I'll* find her." And she pulled Sarah Paton indoors and made her eat the breakfast Mary had prepared, scolding, comforting, and lecturing the poor woman all at once. She herself ate nothing so anxious was she to be off and start the search.

"Lock up, Mary," she said briskly, "and come along. I'll find the little *schelm*, see if I don't, and give her a good shaking for causing all this trouble."

However, a thorough search in every nook and corner of the village, and inquiry at every house, elicited no result, and at the end of the morning, Sister began to look as blank as the muttering women and much more weary. There was no question of school; the children were given a holiday and told to join in the search. The Dutch police were then communicated with, and the afternoon was spent going through Brandersberg. Sister Joanna was on her feet all day, but at five o'clock Mary persuaded her to return home, begging her to eat something and go straight to bed. Mary herself stayed some time later in the Location wandering about, question-

ing, and trying to comfort Sarah Paton with words of hope that had no response in her own breast. It was sundown before she got home tired and dispirited, and it was just as well that she had accepted a cup of tea in the village, for of course Sister had been too tired to prepare a meal and there was not even a fire in the kitchen. Knowing that Sister would be anxious to hear if there was any news, Mary went at once to her bedroom, but there was no one there; only a cloud of flies buzzing and crawling over the sandwich and potato salad which stood untouched by the bedside. *That* meant that Sister had eaten nothing since midday the day before, and Mary was worried. However, in the kitchen she found a cup with the remains of some herbal brew Sister had evidently been making for herself and a moment later Sister herself came out of the Oratory. Fresh hope and courage, gained perhaps in prayer, showed in her face, for though still pale, she looked extraordinarily excited, and her blue eyes gleamed with some inner fire that Mary's news could not quench.

"We shall find her—we shall find her, never fear," she prophesied.

But Mary went to bed cold and miserable, and trying to stave off a bout of neuralgia that had its origin in a tooth she could not afford to have

stopped. The doleful howling of Fingo throughout the night further depressed her, and drove away all hope of sleep. In the morning, Sister Joanna decreed that Fingo must return to Bloemhof.

"I can quite understand your fondness for him, Mary, he's a dear little dog, but we can't be kept awake like this night after night. You must take him back with you to-morrow. By the way, I've made all arrangements for Tom Jackson to call for you."

"But, Sister, I don't want to go. I feel I can't, unless Rosalie is found."

"Nonsense, my dear, what good can you do? If she is to be found I'll find her. While if you miss Jackson's cart you miss your holiday, and I'm not going to have that." There was resolution in the old woman's voice and Mary made no further remark, only ate her breakfast and hurried off to school, for work had to go on whatever befell. It was the last day before the holidays and should have been a bright and merry one, but gloom hung over everyone. The children spoke in hushed voices, and at tiffin time instead of playing sat whispering in groups. Sister Joanna came in for a few moments in the morning and wished the children pleasant holidays; then went

back to where she had been since breakfast time in the village, egging on the search and agitating for a party to be sent into the bush even up the mountain, if necessary.

During afternoon school, Mary's neuralgia became so acute that she determined to go to the cottage for some painkiller, and having set her class a task, she put the eldest pupil-teacher in charged and slipped away.

A short-cut to the cottage was over a broken-down place in the school-yard wall, through the cottage garden, and in by the kitchen door which stood open. Fingo whined as she passed, but she took no notice, being intent on the matter of relieving her pain. Gaining her room, she reached for the painkiller from a shelf and began to apply the medicament to her gums with the tip of her finger. At the same moment, she heard Sister Joanna going through the kitchen to the back door, and was on the point of getting up and making her presence known when the sound of Sister's voice speaking to Fingo arrested her.

"What are *you* snivelling about, you dirty cur?"

Mary could hardly believe her ears. Not only the coarse words astonished her, but the indescribably vicious way in which they were spoken, the harsh voice so utterly unlike the genial tones

she knew so well. The girl sat on her bed as though she had been glued there, and heard the rest of the sentence.

". . . I've a good mind to settle your hash for you—only—" the threat remained unfinished. The speaker had evidently turned back into the kitchen and was moving about. Presently she went into the Oratory, and shut the door. Mary was meditating a stealthy flight, for without going into her own reasons she was suddenly averse to letting Sister Joanna know that she had heard the words addressed to Fingo, when the Oratory door was opened and Sister came back into the kitchen. She seemed to be busy at the drawer of the dresser, and next came the sound of a knife being sharpened on the doorstep. Afterwards there was a dead silence for two or three minutes. Then, in a curiously fierce whisper some words: "*No—no—I mustn't—I mustn't—No! I must wait till to-morrow.*"

A loud rap on the front door broke the sinister spell. Sister Joanna dropping something on the kitchen table left the kitchen, and Mary staying only long enough to hear a voice asking Sister to come at once to see Sarah Paton who was "taken bad," crept out and made her escape by the back door. As she passed through the kitchen, she

saw that the carving knife with a fresh edge to it lay upon the table.

When school was over at last, and the children gone, there was still much to be done, and it was dusk before Mary approached the house again, walking slowly, for she felt a strange reluctance to meet Sister Joanna. But the house was empty. Sister had not returned from her sick visit. Mary made the fire and put on the kettle for a cup of tea; then turned her attention to the matter of supper. Since Sarah Paton had first knocked on the door, no regular meal had been sat down to in the cottage; and after she had visited the larder, the bread-tin, and the egg-jar, Mary's simple calculations told her that if she had eaten little during the two troubled days Sister Joanna had eaten absolutely nothing at all. Apparently another cup of herbal tea had been brewed and drunk, for the empty cup, giving out a faint peculiarly bitter odour, was on the table; herbal tea, however, is poor sustenance, and it behoved Mary to see about getting a good meal ready. The neck of mutton in the larder was two days' old and no good to anyone but Fingo, but fortunately the butcher had left some stewing mutton that morning, and this Mary cut up and put into a sauce-pan with onions and a lump of butter,

browned it over a fierce fire, added a cupful of cold water, and put it to simmer. Then she sat down to peel potatoes. She was going to make an Irish stew. As she sat there, her mind wrestled persistently with the problem of little Rosalie, and when she had finished the potatoes, she determined she would go into the Oratory and pray. She had often prayed for things, as the young do, with fervour and faith, and her prayers had sometimes been answered in a wonderful way. The thought of going to God, now, in the quiet house appealed to her. She stepped softly into the Oratory and kneeling down, not in her usual place but right before the altar, she prayed with all her heart that Rosalie might be found. When she had finished, the tears were streaming down her cheeks, so ardently and pleadingly like a child in trouble had she called upon God. Immediately her heart was lighter, her courage higher. It was as though she had passed a burden from her into other hands—very safe sure Hands.

As she rose, she felt a brittle, crunching sensation under her boot, and stooping picked out something from under the red and brown leaves of the rug, and a thrill of amazement ran suddenly through her. The chapel was by now so dark that she could only dimly see what it was she had

found, but not for a moment did she mistake the familiar feel of a thing she had possessed all her life. It was her own little coral necklace! The necklace Rosalie was wearing when she disappeared!

No sound broke from the girl's lips, but a cry went up from her heart at this strange answer to her prayer. She realised that if she had not gone to the altar step to pray, her foot would never have found the necklace. Bewildered, amazed, *frightened* as she was, she suddenly felt strong and secure,—God was at work.

As she opened the door that led back into the kitchen, lighted only by the flickering firelight, she collided heavily with someone, and her arm was gripped as by a hand of iron.

"What were you doing in there?" Sister Joanna, breathing heavily as if she had been running, barked the question hoarsely at her. Mary stared a moment, a sort of terror creeping over her at that harsh brutal voice heard twice in the same day. Some swift instinct warned her to conceal what she felt.

"I have been praying, Sister," she answered quietly. "Praying that our little Rosalie may be found."

Slowly the grip on her arm relaxed, and as

though nothing untoward had happened, she moved across to the fire and lifted the saucepan.

"I'm afraid my Irish stew is burning! I hope it won't taste."

She was talking to hide something. A terrible inspiration had come to her that she must not share with Sister Joanna the discovery she had just made; and as she shook the saucepan with one hand, with the other she slipped the necklace into her pocket. Then she lighted the kitchen lamp, and got out the teapot.

"I'm just going to make you a cup of tea, Sister," she said cheerfully. "I expect you are dead beat."

The old woman had sunk into a chair by the table, but her eyes had a strange glare in them as she watched Mary, who affecting not to notice, bustled about rattling the tea-things.

"I can see you are just tired out, and as nervous and worried as ever you can be." Mary's arm was still tingling with pain, and that may have had something to do with her newly discovered powers of acting; but the sky-blue eyes still glared. At last, the tea was made and poured out.

"And now tell me, Sister dear,—is there any news yet?"

Sister Joanna gave a sigh as if some tight band

round her had suddenly been loosened and she had breathing space once more.

"No, child," and it was almost her old genial voice. "The men have come back from the bush. But to-morrow they are going up the mountain. I've worked them up to *that*."

"I'm glad," said Mary thoughtfully. "For do you know, Sister, I am beginning to believe as the children do, that there really *is* a mollmeit up there and that she is at the bottom of all the disappearances."

The blue eyes fastened themselves keenly on the girl's face, then, "I have always believed it myself," said Sister Joanna solemnly.

. . . . . .

The Irish stew had only a faintly burnt flavour, and looked appetising enough in its dish; but the sight of it had a curious effect on Sister Joanna. She looked at it almost ravenously, then turned away as though the sight sickened her.

"No—no, I couldn't eat any," she muttered half to herself. "I'm not hungry, but to-morrow —to-morrow I will make myself a little curry. Curry always brings back my appetite and bucks me up when I am tired out."

Mary's own appetite had taken wings since that

curious scene in the kitchen. Nevertheless she made a great pretence of hunger. Fortunately, Sister did not stay to see whether the large helping of stew was eaten, but rose and stumbled towards her room which was next to the dining-room. It was easy to see that she was dropping with fatigue. How could it be otherwise after two days of ceaseless activity during which she had eaten nothing? Her heavy pallid cheeks hung in haggard rolls about her jaws, and with the glare gone out of them, her eyes resembled two large blue beads stuck in a fat doll's face.

"I'll go to bed, Mary," she said heavily. "I must get rest."

"Yes, do, Sister. No Compline in the Oratory to-night, I suppose."

Like a flash, energy came back into the old woman's glance, and the haggard muscles of her face seemed to tighten; but Mary, though her heart had come bounding up into her throat, ate on placidly.

"No," said Sister slowly, "I shall say the Office in my room, and I advise you, my dear, to get to bed as soon as possible, for Jackson will be here for you at five in the morning. Have you got your things ready?"

"Not yet," said Mary, and secretly repeated

to herself, "*Not yet!*" She was dazed, bewildered, and terrified; creeping, creeping terror of she knew not what was in her veins. But not for nothing had she prayed and felt answering faith and courage poured into her heart! Definitely, she knew that after that prayer and its answer she had no right to go yet—until Rosalie was found——

Though she could not eat, she sat for some little time at the table, making sounds with her knife and fork. Her idea was to prolong the evening as much as possible. She did not wish to go to bed until Sister Joanna slept. She could hear the latter undressing, and presently murmuring the words of the Office; later, the iron bed creaked, but sleep was as yet far from that bed. Long ago, Mary had observed in Sister Joanna an intense, almost foxlike acuteness, that in one less kind and genial would have alarmed the girl; now it did alarm her, for from the silent bedroom, through the closed door she felt it directed upon her; those unfortunate last words about Compline had aroused it!

At last, Mary rose and softly cleared the table, went out to the yard and fed Fingo, made one or two little preparations for the morning, then bolted the back door, and retired to her room.

With her door carefully ajar, as she often left it, she then began to shake out and fold up her holiday things and pack them in a carpet bag. In all she did, she was careful to be perfectly natural and make no sound more or less than she would any ordinary night, for she was still aware of that acute attention piercing through the very walls about her. At last, she washed her face, brushed and plaited her hair, and got into bed. But under her night-dress she was fully dressed.

There in the darkness she lay thinking, thinking, and while she thought, she practised breathing regularly and evenly as she had often done when a child. What was the meaning of it all?—the strange words in the kitchen—the abuse flung at the dog—the screeching knife—the grip on her arm—the watching eyes—the coral necklace in the Oratory? Mary had no clear idea; only, when she tried to piece the strange puzzle together, she was afraid with a deadly fear that froze the blood in her veins and paralysed her heart.

It seemed as though years instead of hours passed before that happened which she had known must happen—very gently Sister Joanna's door opened, and feet came padding softly to the kitchen; beside Mary's door they paused; it was

for this moment Mary had practised her regular breathing, and the practise stood her in good stead. After some frightful moments, the longest it seemed to Mary she had ever lived through, the stealthy feet crossed the kitchen, and the Oratory door was opened. It was then that Mary sat up in bed straining her ear-drums until she thought they would crack; but the only sound that reached her was a little soft *creaking* sound. A moment later, she was lying flat again, breathing regularly, for the feet were returning to pause by her door and the light of a candle flickered in. At last the gentle opening and shutting of another door, and the creak of the iron bed under a heavy body told that Sister Joanna had finished her midnight prowlings. It was Mary's turn to get up.

For a full hour, she stood listening in the darkness and in the end she heard the stertorous breathing of a stout, tired woman fallen heavily asleep. To strike a sulphur match without noise was no simple task, and only accomplished by making a cave of the bed-clothes. This time it was Mary who stole, candle in hand, to the Oratory. Drops of cold sweat stood on her forehead and round her mouth, as without a sound she opened the door of that silent room to seek there that which Sister

Joanna had hidden and feared for another to find. Whatever and wherever it was, there was no time to lose. At any moment the old woman might wake! Fearfully the girl stole to the altar, and lifting the heavy red cloth stared beneath. Nothing!

The only other possible place was the oak chest. With faltering hands she lifted the lid (which gave a little creak) and looked in, and at what she saw the candle all but fell from her hand. White and still upon the folded altar-cloths lay the body of little Rosalie. Mary turned faint and sick, but the Power that had sustained her throughout the terrible night did not fail her in that moment. She put out her hand to touch the child, and at the same moment a faint bitter odour of herbs came towards her, and she recognised it as the same she had smelled in the cup in the kitchen. There was a brown stain on the child's lips, and drops of liquid on her dress. Like a flash Mary realised the truth, and touching the little hands found them still warm. The child was not dead, but under the influence of a sleeping herb. Plenty of air came through the holes and cracks of the old chest. She was being kept asleep until—until what. The sinister words muttered in the kitchen came back to memory.

"No, no, I mustn't—I mustn't—I must wait till to-morrow!"

Until to-morrow when Mary would be gone. Was that it? Then, in the silent house—what?

"To-morrow I will make a curry!"

Ah, God! What terrible thoughts! They almost unnerved Mary, but she found strength to catch up the child's still form, and turning fled from the accursed place. The lid of the chest fell with a loud bang, and as she gained the back door and fumbled with the bolt, she heard Sister Joanna leap like a tiger from her lair.

Ah! What a race was that through the black night! Over garden beds to the gate mercifully open, and down the long, lonely road. Far, far in front lay the native village and a single point of light glimmering out from a sick woman's hut; and behind was a wild beast balked of its prey, snarling, and panting. Mary ran until a glaze came over her eyes and the blood burst from her nostrils. The rush of the air woke the child in her arms to weak but piercing crying, and only then did the padding shambling feet behind begin to falter and fall back. But Mary ran staggering on toward the light burning in Sarah Paton's hut, and only stopped to fall fainting on the doorstep.

Within half an hour the tale was told, and men

with lanterns in their hands and black fury in their hearts were out on the road. But they found no one and the school and cottage were both empty.

The mollmeit had fled to the mountain at last.

. . . . . .

Sewn into the mattress of Sister Joanna's bed were discovered the emigration papers of Janet Fink, and later, from under the bed of herbs in the garden men dug out the skulls and bones of four little children. Then, raging, they burned the Cottage and school of the Friend for Little Children, and with brands from the fire set alight the thick bush of the mountain. For four days the flames roared and crackled, sending down great gusts of heat to the town below, and by night lighting up the veld for miles. The rock rabbits and mountain buck came scudding down to the safety of the bush, but the men, deployed in a wide circle round the base of the *berg*, never raised a gun to them so intent were they on their grim vigil.

At length the flames died down, and Thaba Inkosisan blackened and bare, with no leaf or flower or branch, nor any living thing left upon it, gloomed silent above the town.

On the Way to Beira

On the Way to Beira

BETTINGTON lounged moodily against the counter of Randal & Hallam's *winkel*, his eyes sardonic, his mouth decorated with discontent. He was bored to the verge of suicide. Two whole days had been wasted in Umtali waiting for the convoy of waggons with all his kit on board, to arrive from Salisbury. Thirty miles off he had taken advantage of a lift offered him by a man in a trap and come on ahead. Now he was wishing himself back at the waggons instead of stuck in this place where everyone appeared to have been dead and buried for the last five years, in spite of the recent native rebellion when they had all had to leave their homes and come into laager with not enough food and ammunition to go round. Since then the Imperial troops had passed through, bent on punitive measures, and people had gone back to their homes and were dully occupied in nursing and feeding themselves into good health again.

The burden of Bettington's song of dolour was that there was no one to talk to, nothing to drink but bad whiskey at a pound a bottle, not a man who could play poker worth a tin tack, no one keen on a shoot, and not a pretty woman in sight! Driven to sitting among the piles of coloured blankets, and bags of meal, and Kaffir corn, that composed the stock-in-grade of Randal & Hallam, he grew madder and madder every minute. Not so was he accustomed to waste his good time and rare gifts.

The shop was a large galvanised iron shed, lined with shelves and a counter, and stuffed with every imaginable thing on earth that had a strong smell attached to it—leather, limbo, toilet soap, paraffin, cheese, tarred rope, shoddy blankets, and tinned foods sweltering in their tins.

Hallam who had been a medical student at Columbia until the examiners turned him down, was casting up the firm's books, perched on a packing-case at the far end of the shop. Randal flannel-shirted, pipe in mouth, coatless, tieless, his fair hair in damp streaks on his forehead, sat opposite Bettington, his elbows folded on the counter before him. No one would have guessed him an old Harrovian (except Bettington who was one himself), and one who in his year had

stroked for Leander, but he was at peace with all the world, in spite of a poisoned foot that kept him from leaving the premises. Nothing about him of the restless energy which characterised the blonde man burnt a bright red who sat on the other side of the counter.

Vigour and vitality was in Bettington's every line. He wore his hat slouched low, but beneath it could be discerned a shrewd grey-green eye, a nose jutting out like an insolent rock, a mouth with more than a hint of coarseness but none of weakness about it.

With the crop in his hand, he smote indiscriminately at his gaitered legs or the bags of mealies and other merchandise surrounding him.

"Nice country!" he muttered, giving so vicious a cut at a pile of shoddy Kaffir blankets, striped with gaudy red and yellow, that a cloud of dust ascended from it and joined all the other little cloudlets whirling and whisking through the open door from the hot and dusty street.

"*You* needn't kick—you're leaving it," said Randal, sucking peacefully at his pipe. "Stop beating the colour out of my blankets. I got to make my living selling them for *portières* and table covers."

"No one in this hole with the spunk to get up a

shoot, and half a dozen lions roaring their heads off out at Penhalonga! Oh, pot!"

"Yes, it's sad," agreed Randal. "But the fellows round here are like Oom Paul, they haven't lost any lions. Besides, this is the first I've heard of half a dozen. The nigger only reported one, and I daresay he saw that in his dreams."

Bettington became inconsequently derisive.

"This would be a fine place to raise a team for the Olympian Games, I should think—or send out an expedition against the Mad Mullah—any great adventure might have birth here!"

"What a fellow you are, Bettington! Haven't you had enough excitement round Salisbury during this unholy rebellion? One would think you'd be glad of a rest!"

"Rest—nothing," said the other savagely. "Time enough to rest when I'm dead."

"You soon will be, all right," prophesied Randal cheerfully. "You worry too much behind your face."

No similar accusation could be levelled at Eustace, commonly known as Useless Randal, and Bettington was about to intimate as much when something caused him to sit to attention. A woman had quietly entered the shop, and from a sheet of paper in her hand began to read out a list of her

requirements to Hallam. It transpired that she stood in need of a tin kettle, a water bag, six tins of bully beef, six ditto of sardines, a box of biscuits, matches, sugar, tea, coffee, and plenty of condensed milk. All were to be packed in an open packing-case ready for use on a journey. Bettington listened to these instructions because he liked the sound of her voice, but he considered it out of place in Randal to sit with mouth open and ears cocked like a terrier at point.

She had pretty dark bronzy hair pushed up under a sunburnt Panama; worn but well-shaped brown leather shoes; ditto gloves; and a good line to her grey linen coat. When she turned away from Hallam to look speculatively at the provisions on the shelves, Bettington caught sight of a pale haughty little profile, a small ear, and a curving cheek. It was a long while indeed since a profile had impressed him so agreeably. A slight sound, made no doubt inadvertently, with his crop, caused her to turn her head quickly in the direction of the two men, revealing for a moment a face that would more than have fulfilled the promise of its outline but for the look of weariness and disdain stamped upon it. At her glance, Randal rose upon his poisoned foot, clutched the buttonless shirt across his bosom, and bowed with grace.

Bettington, whose hat had been jammed on his forehead concealing all but one arrogant eye, removed it abruptly and placed it on the counter, thus affording to anyone sufficiently interested an uninterrupted view of the sanguine complexion and well-shaped head of Africa's most brilliant journalist.

It was not quite apparent whether or not the lady availed herself of this priceless opportunity —while nodding recognition to Randal, but a faint colour showed in her cheek as she turned back to Hallam.

"Please don't forget the condensed milk," she murmured. "And would you try and pick out the freshest looking tins, Mr. Hallam? My little child lives on it, and it is very important to have it good. You know the last you had was dreadfully yellow and old."

"Yes, it was a bad lot, Mrs. Stannard. I am awfully sorry, but, as you know, we couldn't help it. We never meant to sell that consignment when we found it was bad. But Colonel Monk commandeered it for the children's use as there was nothing better in the town."

"I know. I'm not complaining," she said gently. "The children would have starved without it. Only I do hope you've got some fresher tins in now?"

"Why, certainly," Hallam waved his hand at the well-filled shelves behind him. "We've got plenty of everything since the troops came up. And I can vouch for the milk—it's a first-class brand, and fresh as paint. Where are these things to be sent, Mrs. Stannard? Out to your camp?"

"No," she said in a low voice; "keep them here until that convoy of waggons arrives from Salisbury—they are expected to-night, I believe—then send the box out to be put on the waggon in which I have engaged accommodation for myself and child." Hallam looked up as if something had hit him, but she stared at him so haughtily that he dropped his eyes and applied himself to the business of adding up the bill. She paid, and with a cold nod and no further glance at the other men left the shop. Bettington, having occasion to go to the door to examine some whip thongs that hung in a bunch before the entry, saw her walking in light fleet fashion towards the Police Camp.

"*She* won't hurt the daisies," he murmured pleasantly to himself, as he sauntered back into the shop where the two other men were neck deep in what sounded perilously like village scandal.

"What do you think of that?" Hallam was

inquiring with a stunned air. He had come over to Randal's side of the shop. "She's had enough! Going to take the baby and scoot!"

"And I don't blame her a brass button. The only wonder is she didn't do it long ago!" Randal wore a judicial manner.

"Her sister kept her from it, I guess, and lack of funds. Stannard is tight with the sinews of war. Needs them all to square his whiskey bills."

Bettington made no attempt to take part in this interesting dialogue, but listened to it very carefully and pensively.

"What will Miss van Rimmel do?" Randal wondered. "Go with her?"

"Not she. She's always been dead against her sister leaving Stannard. Thinks that while there's life there's hope of reformation, even in such a double-dyed sheep as he is. I bet if Mrs. Stannard does go, *she'll* stay behind and nurse Stan through—and the Doc says he's got 'em bad this time—rats and cats and purple elephants."

"I don't care what colour the menagerie is as long as it keeps Miss van Rimmel here."

"Me neither," averred Hallam elegantly.

They became aware of Bettington's sardonic presence, and dropped the subject as if it burnt.

"As I was saying," remarked Randal briskly,

"we had better take fifty pounds of that dried buck off that Boer. It's the best biltong I've struck since I dunno when."

"Right you are!" Hallam began to write in his note book. Randal turned his attention to the thoughtful journalist.

"What about your lions, Bet? Still think of going out to look for them?"

Bet regarded him pensively.

"So I am to have the society of a pretty lady between here and Beira?" he remarked.

"You? Who said so?" Randal's voice sounded slightly aggressive. "I suppose there are other people besides you on those waggons, Bettington?"

"Yes, but no one so good-looking," said Bettington, wrinkling his rocky nose and gazing at them with bland eyes. "Besides the only empty tent is the one on the waggon where my kit is."

The other two studied his red complexion discontentedly.

"Well, you ought to be very nice to that lady," quoth Hallam at last.

"I'll try to be," promised Bettington earnestly. The American may or may not have been reassured, but Randal stirred uneasily.

"She drew a blank in the marriage lottery, all right," continued Hallam. "But she has a nice

little kid, and a sister that could take any man in this country in tow if she cared to, but she don't."

"Wise sister!" thought Bettington, "but I'm glad it's not *she* who's going to Beira." What he said was:

"I should regard Stannard as more in the nature of a surprise packet with a live bomb inside it than a blank. I used to know him years ago, before drink and gambling debts drove him out of the army. How came a pretty woman like that to tie up with him?"

"You can search me. I guess she hadn't seen many other fellows."

"That was just it," proffered Randal. "They belong to an old Huguenot family, and these girls were brought up as innocent as lambs on a farm near Worcester, and I suppose thought everything that had worn a British uniform was an angel, and every man that came from England a gentleman."

"Well, they know better now, no doubt," remarked Bettington pleasantly, and looked at his watch. "I think I'll go round to the Bank and see if I can decoy Johnson out to Penhalonga tonight. Sure you won't come, Hallam?"

"Can't! Randal's poisoned foot has me tied up here."

After the journalist had gone, Randal spoke to his partner gloomily. "Damn bad luck his going on the same trek with Mrs. Stannard. She's just rottenly unhappy enough not to care what she does, and he's just the fellow women throw their bonnets over the mill for."

"Why, he is as ugly as Halifax!" exclaimed Hallam.

"That makes nix. He's got brains behind that lovely complexion, and women like brains."

"More likely that insolent, don't-care-a-tinker's-curse air of his that gets 'em," mused the American.

"He doesn't care a tinker's curse either. He'd walk over anybody to get his own way. He threw down the editorship of the biggest paper at the Cape because he wouldn't take orders from the owners, and the same thing up at Salisbury. He hadn't run the *Journal* a month before he bust up with Max the proprietor. Refused to air Max's politics because they weren't his own, and went off and fought the niggers instead. Now he's got another big job in Johannesburg. Everybody wants him till they get him. There's no doubt he can put it all over every other journalist in South Africa."

Later, the subject of this monograph returned to the shop with a demand for .303 cartridges,

and the announcement that he had got Johnson, a horse, and some boys. Remained only to get the lion, and he seemed cocksure of that.

His parting injunction to Randal was to have his box of provisions put on McKinnon's waggon if the convoy passed through before he got back, and to send out a messenger to let him know where the waggons were so that he could go straight after them without returning to Umtali.

As it happened, he did not get back, and the waggons passed through that night whilst he and Johnson were lying behind a roughly constructed scherm between the Penhalonga hills. Smokeless, drinkless, oppressed by a deep and nameless silence, ears straining and guns at the cock, they were in a state of discomfort only to be suffered in the quest for glory. But the lion came at the pitch black hour of two, and his doom was dight.

They breakfasted in the grey dawn, and while the boys skinned the trophy, Johnson, who besides being a bank manager, was a gossip and something of a wit, regaled the journalist with amusing biographies of the Umtali residents. Incidentally the Stannards came before the board, and Bettington learned, among other things, that the ex-army man had been running a farm out beyond the Police Camp, that the farm was a failure, and all

his wife's money had gone in it, likewise the money of his sister-in-law; that the latter was very pretty, and Randal and Hallam only two of a dozen men who were in love with her; but that she would have none of them, preferring to devote all her time to the business of minding the Stannard baby and keeping the peace in the Stannard household. In fact, there was very little about this unpropitious ménage that Bettington did not learn, and the more he heard the more he felicitated himself upon the fact that with the oxen and veld in the state they were it would take ten good days to reach Beira. Those ten days looked good to him. Next to shooting, and fighting, and writing, he held that life had nothing more piquant to offer than the society of a pretty, disillusioned married woman. It was not so much because he was a scoundrel that he preferred them married, as because he knew himself fonder of adventure and travel and a careless life than he could ever be of a wife. Wherefore he had long ago decided that marriage was not for him. It did not follow, according to *his* code, that flirtation was not for him; only that he must eschew the society of pretty girls and devote himself to the pretty women who were safely tied up. Certainly, even in this there was a risk of finding himself laid by the

heels for life; but it was less of a risk than flirtation with girls entailed.

For the rest, he held with Gordon that

> No game was ever yet worth a rap
> For a rational man to play;
> Into which no accident or mishap
> Could possibly find a way.

It was on the evening of the following day that he came upon the convoy of waggons outspanned a few miles beyond Christmas Pass—a romantic spot with a backing of velvet mountains, a foreground of rolling plain, and a three-quarter moon like a crushed pearl hanging over all. Evening fires were alight, there was clank of pan and pannikin, and pleasant savoury odours pervaded the air. Little groups of men lay upon the ground—many of them had tramped all day and were weary. Women were unpacking provision baskets and children pranced happily about the fires.

In all, about forty people were travelling together down to the coast with the idea of getting away for a time from a country which during the last year had suffered the double mischance of war and cattle pest. Some of the travellers were ruined farmers, others were miners whose machinery and property had been destroyed by the

natives. There were men too, who, having been wounded in the fighting, were going down to Durban or the Cape to recruit. Several families were leaving the country altogether, disheartened by the disasters they had suffered. The war was over, but on account of the existing danger of small parties being attacked by still revengeful natives, the Government had placed this convoy of waggons, with drivers and boys at the disposal of such people as were anxious to get away. The regular mail service not yet having been resumed, Bettington, in a great hurry to reach Johannesburg, had been thankful, like many another, to avail himself of this opportunity to get down country.

He picked his way through the camp, stopping only to inquire as to the whereabouts of his boy and McKinnon's waggon; greeting an acquaintance or two; and refusing a pressing invitation to sup at the waggon of the "wounded bunch," one of whom, an American surgeon on crutches with a bullet lodged in his hip bone, was a very good friend of his.

Bettington had not joined any mess coming down from Salisbury, for he was a fellow of moods and tenses, and constant companionship bored him. Times were when he liked his society high, and times were when he preferred it low, but always

he chose to seek and cull it for himself, and for that which was thrust upon him he had no use. He rather estranged people by giving the impression that he believed the world made for the special benefit of Bettington, and nothing in it quite too good for Bettington; but this arrogance of character was more assumed than real; for he had discovered that it rid him of society he did not need, and insured him against intrusion when he wanted to work, or in those dark hours which came to him as to the most self-satisfied of us when he was face to face with the fact that Bettington was no very great chalks after all, and not within a thousand miles of the fine fellow he set out to be originally.

It cannot be pretended, however, that he was suffering from any such mood at this time. Quite the reverse. A man who has potted his lion overnight owns a little secret fountain of vainglory to drink at that will keep him from being thirsty for some time.

He was hungry, however, and hot, and slightly footsore, for he had handed over his borrowed horse to Randal's messenger and thereafter tramped some miles of bad road with the thermometer at something over a hundred and ten.

As he approached his waggon, he became aware

of a woman's slight graceful figure sitting on a box not far off, with a little child playing at her knees. Her profile etched against the firelight, was one which, though he had only seen it once, he very well remembered. From the shadows came forth his servant, a meek-eyed Makalika scoundrel, anxious to see how his baas would take the information that a lady and her "bébé" were in part possession of his waggon.

"*That's* all right, Bat," said Bettington trying to keep an inflection of nobility out of his voice. "Camp my things out under that tree over there, and get me a towel. Which way is the river?" (No outspan is ever very far away from a river.)

"Just over there, my baas."

"Have my supper ready when I come back. I suppose you got some fresh meat and bread in the town?"

"No, my baas," was the modest reply.

"What? The dickens take you——!"

"I didn't know when my baas would be back, my baas."

"Oh! Hel—p! Get out some bully beef then, you—you idiot!" Bettington gulped down worse things, wondering gloomily how he was going to suppress the expression of his real opinion of Bat during the rest of the journey, for the

boy was a most particular fool and the bane of his life.

Moreover, on returning from his dip with the appetite of a wolf gnawing his vitals, he found that though his blankets had been perfunctorily unrolled under the specified tree, of supper there was no sign. His box of provisions had not been got off the waggon, and there was not so much as a tin of bully in sight!

"Bat!—you—you *bat!*" he roared in a terrible voice. But Bat was *non est.* Wise for once, he had melted away into the night.

"Of all the miserable—!" Bettington was obliged to put his pipe into his mouth and bite on that. Bitterly he thought of that invitation to supper recently refused and by now probably a dead letter.

"My Inkosisan wants to speak to the baas," a voice so gentle and modest that it might have been Bat's own, spoke at his elbow. It was in fact another of the afflicted Makalika race who stood waving an apologetic hand in the direction of the lady by the waggon. As Bettington moved towards her, she rose from her box and addressed him in a charming but distressed voice.

"I can't tell you how awfully sorry I am, but it appears that I have got your box of provisions."

"Don't mention it," said Bettington, mechanically polite.

"Mine has evidently been put on to some other waggon by mistake, and I was actually just about to eat your things for my supper." She motioned to where on another packing-case set out with white enamel plates some slices of bully beef had been arranged with a tomato salad.

She looked young and slight in the firelight, and her hair was bronzier than ever. Bettington put on his most velvety manners.

"And I hope you still will. I'm delighted that the things have been of any use, though I'm afraid the box contains only the most ordinary kind of junk."

"Not at all—it is full of good things. I had my lunch and breakfast out of it to-day—it never occurred to me for a moment until I heard your boy questioning mine about your box—then I casually glanced at the lid—and to my horror, the name Bettington!"

"I am sorry my name should so unpleasantly inspire you," he deplored.

"Oh, of course—I didn't mean—I——"

"The only possible amends I can make is to go at once and look for your box while you finish your supper."

"Oh, but I couldn't—I am so ashamed. First, it appears, I deprive you of your tent—and now of your food."

"I assure you I have never used the tent in my life. I always prefer to sleep out in the open. As for the food, it makes no odds at all, please believe me."

"But your boy ran away when he could not find your box. You will have no supper!—You *must* share mine," she proffered shyly. He gave a surreptitious glance at the wafery slices of beef and tomatoes, then answered with alacrity:

"Not at all, not at all. I wasn't going to have any supper anyway. I'm—I'm not hungry."

He had in fact decided that this was no time to put on exhibition the wolf that raged within him. And his manners being persuasive as well as pretty, he eventually convinced the lady of his sincerity, and she sat down to finish her supper alone while he departed with the air of a man with a mission—which was exactly what he was.

Straight as a homing pigeon he headed for the waggon of the wounded warriors. Most of them had already turned in, but the American surgeon, resting near the remains of a good meal, hailed him blithely:

"Hullo, Bet!"

"For the love of Michael Angelo give me a drink, and a wedge of bread and bully," said the hapless Bet. "And send your animal of a Makalika to search every waggon until he finds Mrs. Stannard's box of provisions. When found, deliver to me."

Later, his inner man replenished, he returned to McKinnon's waggon with the air of a conqueror and the recovered box of provisions.

"Well! we've got it, Mrs. Stannard!"

She looked up at him with such surprise that he wondered at first whether she had never expected to see it again. Then the truth occurred to him.

"I beg your pardon. But I was in Randal & Hallam's the day you came in to do your shopping. You wouldn't of course have noticed me" (the expectant pause he made here was almost imperceptible), "but I was impertinent enough to inquire your name."

"And you recognised me again?"

"There are some faces one never forgets," he said quietly, but effectively. Looking up into his eyes, she saw there something which she had seen in the eyes of men before that night; and which always roused in her a longing to rub their noses in the dust.

"Let us hope they are not all crowned with hats," she said laughingly. "Memory might be over-crowded."

He was delighted with her. To be witty as well as pretty! That made the game worth the heat and toil of the chase! Thus they stood, the rose-lights from the fires about them, the great crushed pearl above them; taking each other's measure, marking down each other's weaknesses, and each secretly registering a vow to the other's undoing. But they parted with the pleasant conventional phrases under which both good and bad intentions are so subtly concealed.

. . . . . .

She breakfasted within sight the next morning, but he did not go near her, being content after having exchanged a morning greeting, to sit under his tree and reflect upon the ten good days to come. She made a charming picture in her dark short skirt, white blouse, and the rather rakish Panama he remembered so well as a feature of their first encounter in Randal's *winkel*. She had brightened up wonderfully since then, he thought. Perhaps the relief of leaving all her domestic troubles behind her had something to do with it, but certainly disillusion had done no harm to her complexion so far, nor worry spoiled the fine line

of her cheek and chin. Her looks had an edge to them that appealed to the connoisseur in him. It was not so much that she was pretty, as that she had good lines and that her clear pallor, the tilt of her head, and her dainty walk, carried an air of race and insolence with them; both things that meant something to a man like Bettington who admired the quality of insolence in women almost more than anything—probably because he knew how unworthy he was of anything but their insolent toleration.

Before the day's trek began, there was a lot of gathering up and stowing away of belongings to be done, and it was natural that Bettington being on the spot should help Mrs. Stannard.

Natural too that he should suggest a tramp ahead as per the example set by numerous other couples, all anxious to avoid the dust and monotony of the trek and get some exercise into the bargain. She tramped a little while with him, and he liked her long swinging walk, and found her mind as buoyant as her feet. When the boy who was perched on the brake of her waggon guarding little Aimée came running to report that the bébé was awake and crying, Bettington could have kicked him with the greatest blessing in the world. Moreover it occurred to him that babies were odious

little beasts, and that no nice woman ought to saddle herself with such things.

But on later afternoons he blessed the pale and fretful Aimée, for without her as a chaperon he could not have sat hour after hour on the brake of Mrs. Stannard's waggon talking to her on every subject in the world but the one that filled his mind and was to be read plainly in his eyes by anyone who took the trouble to look deep enough.

Mrs. Stannard was very careful to look neither deep nor long. Bettington came to the conclusion that she was a very clever woman, though he often wondered where she had got her experience. Marriage with Stannard might well have constituted an education, of a kind. But where had she learned that delightful way of assuming all the frank innocence of a young girl?—that lent such piquancy to the fact that she was really a married woman doing a bolt from her duties! And where achieved the subtle art of keeping a man with his toe to the chalk line, without wearing him out or allowing him to show his impatience for the starting bell? Bettington admired her almost to stupefaction for these things. At least it was to stupefaction he assigned the fact that he sometimes found himself sitting and gazing at her until the red crept in a little curly wave from her

chin to the bronzy hair. Then indeed it was time to talk about literature, or make himself so useful and amusing to Aimée that Aimée's mother would not have the heart to drive him away, under the pretext that she had a headache or that Aimée wanted to go to sleep.

She had beautiful eyes of an uncommon colour, rather like liquid amber, and as full of dots and dashes as a Marconi message, only far more interesting to read. So thought Bettington at least, and would have liked to spend a great deal of time in sorting out and classifying the natural shades and shadows in them from those brought flickering there by humour or melancholy or any other mood that seized her. When he found out one day by picking up a bracelet which belonged to her that she was called Amber, he rejoiced with his journalistic sense at the singular appropriateness of it, and that night found him lying under the waggon scribbling in his note-book a poem which began:

O amber heart, and amber eyes!

That the subject of it was sitting not far off in the gloaming shadows, hushing Aimée to sleep and looking rather like a gentle modern Madonna, lent the sting of secret and forbidden pleasure to

his occupation. As Wilde says: "The simplest thing is a joy when it is secret!"

The one fly in the amber, so to speak, was Aimée. She was always on the spot, and as ubiquitous as only a baby less than a year old can be. True, Mrs. Stannard commanded the services of a nurse-boy called September, but the latter was mostly busy with the pots and pans, and Aimée preferred the society of her mother or, failing that, of Bettington. Yes, much to his secret annoyance (and this secret was no joy) the little animal actually liked to sprawl over him, clutching at his moustache and poking her fingers in his ears and up his nose. Sometimes she howled for him to hush her to sleep, and once she refused to take her bottle unless he gave it to her! Another time she spilled her bottle all over his very spick and span breeches and gaiters, and upon that festival he could very willingly have killed and eaten her. Another and horrible occasion when he was lying peacefully on his rug under the waggon, with Amber Eyes sitting sewing on a water barrel near by, the baby crawled over to him, lolled upon him amorously and was sick amongst his hair! Amber released him from its clutches and he escaped to the river, but he hated to look back on that moment—it was not one of those in which

he could truthfully claim to have been the master of his fate and the captain of his soul!

He never could make out what on earth Mrs. Stannard saw in the little monkey to justify the amount of devotion she lavished on it. Many a time and oft, when to *his* mind a sound spanking would have filled the bill, he was astonished to see with what tenderness and patience Amber Eyes beguiled the peevish elf back to happiness. But, somehow, though it made him impatient he never could help liking her all the better for it. The trouble was that everything she did made him like her the better, but she gave no sign of being similarly affected, and the ten good days were speeding by with never a silver arrow nor a red rose to mark their flight! Five were already gone, and nothing achieved but this one-sided love affair with the abominable Aimée! When he came to think of it, it made him tired. After all, he was a man and a journalist, and something more he hoped to Gad, than food for babes and sucklings! What did Amber Eyes take him for? Having asked himself this question several times, he grew very broody, and wasted a sixth day in sulking.

This, he was delighted to note brought her to her bearings, and she began to give him more of her attention. Aimée, whose health was visibly

improving from day to day, was handed over more often to the tender care of September, and Mrs. Stannard and Bettington resumed their tramps ahead of the waggons, spending long afternoons and evenings in an intimacy that for two people who were nothing to each other would have been almost impossible anywhere else in the world except on the South African veld. None of the other people with the waggons made any comment, most of them being busy grinding little axes of their own, and the rest too full up with the weariness of life to care two bones how that fellow Bettington (who thought such a deuce of a lot of himself!) and Mrs. Stannard (whom none of them knew) were occupying their time.

So that Bettington had quite a lot of

Time and place and woman altogether

in which to reveal the other side of his soul to Amber Eyes. In fact, he felt that it was up to him to show her the kind of man she had been turning into a nurse-maid and mother's help; and Bettington in the showing-off attitude was an entrancing spectacle. Fortunately, he sometimes became so interested in the mind of his listener that he forgot to "show off" and then she was

really to be felicitated, for Bettington, once you got past a thin outer crust of conceit and arrogance, was an uncommonly clever fellow. In fact, in the matter of his work, he was something of a genius, and when a man has the star of genius glimmering —however faintly—within, a dozen good qualities will be sure to be found, like attendant satellites waiting upon it and throwing it into prominence. Furthermore, he loved his profession with a whole-hearted love and knew the practising of it inside out, and up and down the earth, and backwards and forwards upon it, and most things that were to be known about literature past, present, and future. And to his intense satisfaction, Amber Eyes cared also for these things. Her mind had not been spoiled by shallow reading, for she had been educated with great simplicity, and since coming to Rhodesia had lived among men more familiar with sport and out-door life than with intellectual matters. But she had a natural taste for literature and took to all things pertaining to it as a duck to water. Bettington found her mind not only ready to receive, but to retain what he could feed to it and thereafter to formulate opinions and convictions on what she had heard. He was greatly pleased with her, and as happy as a sparrow on a pump handle, until she went away from him

to eat or sleep or mind the baby. Then, he poignantly remembered that it was not thus he had planned to spend the time between Umtali and Beira! What booted it to him to turn a pretty unhappy woman's eyes inwards to the cultivation of her literary instincts instead of in his own direction? He derided himself for a duffer and was more tormented by the thought of imaginary silver arrows gone astray than was St. Sebastian by the real steel-tipped article. He dreamed of red roses left ungathered by the roadside, and he wrote another poem.

It was at Massi-kessi that she found it lying loose between the leaves of a volume of Henley he had lent her, and she could not but read it for it wore her initials at its head:

You came and called me when the world was grey,
You whispered of a land of endless May;
Of flowers abloom, fair skies, birds always singing:
And I, half-listening, lingered on my way.

Yes, I half-lingered with a troubled heart,
Your dearest sweetness had a touch of smart!
Ever at fall of eve I heard the tolling
Of Life's grim curfew bidding us to part.

Ah! was it well to take the lonelier way?
To thrust with prudent hands the cup away,
To leave the harvest of your heart ungarnered,
And all the precious treasure of our love to pay?

When she had read it, she gave a curious, furious little laugh and said,

"What abominable impertinence!"

But if Bettington could have seen the colour in her cheeks he would have counted unto himself the first red rose.

They left the waggons at Massi-kessi for it was the railway terminus from the coast and they were all to embark next day on the Portuguese train for a journey through Portuguese territory. In the meantime, most of the travellers—for the sake of sleeping in a bed again, and eating a dinner cooked on a stove and served on a table—adjourned to the corrugated-iron hotel which stood bleak and blue in the midst of a waste of sands. Mrs. Stannard and her baby were amongst those who went over, and, needless to say, Bettington followed the trail. He spent a good deal of the morning arranging the *menu* for an exclusive little dinner party composed of himself and Mrs. Stannard. It was a charming dinner too and the *menu* a great success, though it embraced nothing more original than a fried sole, lamb cutlets with green vegetables, a sweet omelette, fresh fruit for dessert, and a bottle of wine on ice. This does not sound pretentious, but in the "good old times" in Rhodesia people never saw fresh fruit or fresh fish from

one month's end to another; goat was the only meat ever available and ice a thing remembered only in fevered dreams as a feature of life in some far-away fair land of a long-ago existence. Wherefore Bettington and his guest dined *chez* Lucullus that evening, and felt very well and happy after it as they sat with a dozen other people on the cool dark stoep, or strolled up and down the one long street of sand. There was a huge mountain of wool-bales lying ready for transportation just beside the hotel, and Amber Eyes, who for some reason was as gay as a canary in a golden cage, had a fancy for climbing this mountain and sitting on its summit, so as to get as near the stars as possible, she said. Their two cigarette tips were the only points of light in the vapoury darkness. She had never smoked a cigarette in her life before, and this fact refreshed the jaded heart of Bettington, accustomed to women who mostly smoked too many. They sat talking there, under the stars and their old friend the crushed pearl who arrived late, until after midnight, and he beguiled her with brilliant tongue and words sweeter than honey in the honeycomb. But her hand was never once within reach of his. Neither did she confide in him that her husband was a brute! Certainly she was an original woman!

Since none of the usual confidences were forthcoming from her direction then, Bettington began to unfold (so eloquently that he almost believed it himself) on the poignant loneliness and misery of such a lot in life as his. But his word pictures evoked nothing better from her than silvery giggles, and after she had had enough, she took a firm hand on the reins once more, and turned his nose into the safe fields of literature and adventure. He had tired of these subjects and was a little inclined to fall into gloom when she would not listen to the tales of his woes, but she was so gay and sparkly it seemed a pity to dim her pleasure, and churlish not to sparkle and be gay with her. So he bottled up his emotions for the time being, though he did not omit to put as much of them as he dared into his good-night handshake. He possessed very firm magnetic hands and had rather specialised in the use of them in cases where speech was not permitted.

He slept badly that night. It seemed to him that, in spite of all the good fun he got out of his success as a soldier of fortune and journalist, he was missing some vital thing in life and he could not bear it. He hated missing things. It made him feel like the "weariest river" making a bee-line for the nearest sea.

In the tender sunshine of early morning, they took train for the coast. The carriages were two long narrow affairs on a two-foot gauge, built like tram-cars, with seats running down the sides and the passengers sitting in two lines facing each other. Amber Eyes and her baby had a seat in a corner of the men's compartment because for one reason, Aimée could not bear to be separated from her unwilling love, Bettington, and for another because in the other compartment a woman was too critically ill to be able to bear the noise of a little child.

Hour by hour, the tender sunshine of dawn developed into smiting, biting heat that blistered the paint on the roof above their heads. Some of the men slept uneasily and some sat wrapt in reflection. Bettington could have done with an idle hour himself, but Aimée kept him busy. She sprawled and clambered on him, and banged his watch against his nose. He would have liked to bang *her* nose on the floor, but the fact that Amber Eyes in her corner grew paler and paler every moment, drooping like a flower in the heat, kept a galvanised smile on his face. If he did not look after Aimée she would torment her mother, and that contingency was not to be thought of. But oh! how he would have enjoyed pushing the little

worm out of the window,—and probably would have done it if it could have been engineered without suspicion attaching to himself. He saw some of the wounded warriors exchanging facetious smiles as Aimée tore his hair, whooping like a Comanchee on the war-path, and could only glare at them and curse inwardly, meditating on the revenge he would take out of their pockets on the voyage down coast.

"I'll rook them of every red cent at poker," he promised savagely. "I'll make them cough up their last bone!"

Towards afternoon Aimée felt seedy, and despite all his efforts to keep her, climbed over to Amber Eyes and lay lamenting in her arms. Then did Bettington sitting forward, contort his face and do strange tricks with his fingers, and almost burst himself in the effort to amuse her. But nothing was any good. She would stare for a moment with her large slate-coloured eyes, then they would fill up and brim over with tears, even while they remained wide open and observant, and she lamented like a banshee. Sometimes she screwed herself into a ball and ejected sharp barking sounds, and sometimes she lengthened herself into a plank that would not be bent up again; but always at spasmodic intervals she

howled. The heat beat down through the carriage roof on to the cooped-up travellers and came in sweltering waves through the open windows. Mrs. Stannard grew paler than ever and great purple shadows lay like pansies under the amber eyes. Suddenly her hold on the baby relaxed and the latter rolled on to the floor. Some other man picked her up and comforted her as best he might while Bettington made play with the water bottle and brandy flask. After a little while, Mrs. Stannard recovered and rewarded him with a pale smile and stammering apology.

"I am ashamed. It is too bad of us—first Aimée and now me. How you must hate us!"

It was at about that time that Bettington began to realise that he loved her. The real thing had got hold of him at last. He wished he could take her in his arms and kiss away her troubles and her tears forever. He would have given his skin to sole her shoes with. He wished he could die for her. But he only turned very pale himself, and set his arrogant jaw, and took Aimée on his knees and hushed her, and didn't give a damn any more what the other men thought, and prayed for the end of that infernal journey as he had never prayed for anything in his life.

At length, the weary day drew to a close, and in the hot darkness the train pulled up at Fontes-Villa, which is—or was in those days—a unique little corrugated-iron Hades situated on one of the best malarial and mosquito sites in the world. The swamp on which it stood sizzling resembled a large stage carpet made of coarse artificial grass and rushes dyed a bright green by the arsenate-of-copper process. Sliding past in stealthy grim silence, full of crocodiles, and germs, and green slime, was the Pungwe River.

Here the train stood brooding for some hours as if considering the advisability of a midnight plunge. No one seemed to know what was going to happen next, and no one cared much. Enough that after the waggling, jerking, switch-back movements that had prevailed all day there was quiescence. A turgid, heavily-smelling breeze of sorts that meandered unwillingly through the long compartment seemed a heaven-sent zephyr, and everything would have been beautiful if only Aimée had not been vile. She continued her clamourings with renewed energy, and Amber Eyes said that she needed a bottle and that if Bettington would hold the poor little thing she would go and find September and send him up to the hotel (if there was one) to get warm water

and mix a bottle of condensed milk. Naturally Bettington volunteered to go and lug out September himself from the truck in which the native boys were sleeping. After an interval then, September arrived with the mixed bottle and Aimée got her supper. But before she was half through it, Amber Eyes discovered that the water was stone cold and would probably be the cause of cramps in Aimée's anatomy for the rest of the voyage. Again the luckless Bettington went a-hunting for September, but this time the quest was unsuccessful of any result except the news that both September and his own boy Bat had made up their mysterious and labyrinthian minds that they did not care to proceed further on the journey, therefore had taken their blankets and headed back for Umtali. Another thing that Bettington learned was that September had not gone to the hotel at all for water for the baby's bottle, nor even looked for an hotel, but had simply slunk down to the river's edge, shipped a bottle of the grey-green slime and mixed it *au naturel* with the condensed milk. This information the journalist kept to himself. He did not think it would be of the slightest use to Mrs. Stannard, and if Aimée were poisoned—*tant pis* for Aimée! But he doubted there being any such

luck. Aimée, he felt convinced, was destined to live to be the scourge of other fine men.

His next job was to go up to the hotel himself and get hot water to make the bottle. Even that was better than sitting still in the little devildom Aimée was creating in the compartment since she found herself robbed of the solacing bottle. Besides Bettington was getting used to his job, even as eels get used to skinning.

One thing to the good was that when he *did* discover the hotel and rouse the inmates he was able to achieve a whiskey and soda, and sandwich for himself, and bear back similar trophies to the fainting and haggard Amber Eyes. As for Aimée, she had her bottle at last, and Bettington felt that the whole noble army of martyrs were not in the running with him. "And after all these vices there was peace!"

Just as silence and slumber were spreading their wings over the weary caravan, the railway officials appeared from nowhere and briskly routed the passengers out in a great hurry to cross the river on a pont and embark on another train waiting on the further side. Ensued a great struggle and scramble after baggage. Eventually the change was accomplished and the journey continued until arrival at the Beira station.

It was for the passengers to find out for themselves that the station was about two miles away from the only possible hotel, and the country between of the roughest kind of veld—all scrub, hillocks, bush, and ant-holes; that there were no conveyances or porters; and that it was up to every man to shoulder his own pack and foot it for home. And it was for Bettington, the brilliant journalist, fascinating man of the world, and gifted poet, to take up the White Man's Burden once more. With Aimée in his arms, a basket containing Aimée's impedimenta on his back, his own knapsack slung about his waist, and Amber Eyes laden with smaller articles bringing up the rear, he felt like a prehistoric man on a forced march for fair pastures and better hunting. And in his heart he was saying:

"I may as well take on the job for good! I've become a family man. I've got used to fixing baby's bottle now and lugging her around. Oh, pot!"

All round them, struggling in the dimness over ant-hill and ant-bear hole, were other baggage-laden forms, faithfully padding the hoof. The "wounded bunch," as became warriors were making light of their woes. From their ranks came an occasional laugh and snatches of a ribald song set

to the opening bars of the "Soldier's March" in *Faust*, accompanied by bang and boom of a tin pannikin and some hollow article (perhaps a bread box?).

> Drunk (bang!) last night,
> Drunk the night before (boom!)
> Drunk (bang!) last night,
> Never get drunk any more! (Boom!)

Bettington felt that he was different to these men. Nobler in some sort. Between them and him lay a great gulf fixed. He had deeper depths and could rise to higher heights. Thank God he was not as these!

Eventually they reached the hotel and Amber Eyes having engaged a room disappeared with the baby and Bettington was his own man once more. He in turn engaged himself a room, and went to bed, to dream that he had a baby of his own and was going to take in washing to earn his living.

As no steamer awaited them at Beira, the passengers from Rhodesia had to amuse themselves as best they might until a steamer turned up. No difficult feat this. Beira also was a corrugated-iron Hades, but at least the verandah of the Royal Hotel was deep and cool and palm-shaded; and there were supplies of fresh fish and fruit; and ice

to clink in the glass; and though the sea was chocolate-coloured and "jiggers" hid in the sands, it *was* the sea, and it smelled of home, and brought memories of far-away joys that were getting nearer! Anyway, it was good to be leaving Rhodesia and trouble behind, with faces set to a new horizon where trouble had not yet materialised! So thought most of the travellers. And perhaps it was the philosophy of Amber Eyes too, and perhaps that was why she so visibly brightened and bloomed. All was well with Aimée as Bettington had opined, in spite of Pungwe River germs, and all was well with the world.

Only Bettington was troubled in his mind. He too had a philosophy that, so far, had helped him to waggle his way pretty well through a weary world, but for the moment it seemed to be suffering from a weak spine. His philosophy had always been to desire things and he would get them, especially if he gave Fate a leg up every now and again, and reached out far enough. True the leg up sometimes hit him a clout in the eye, and the reached-out hand sometimes got its fingers burned; but that was all in the day's shooting and part of the game. The main point was that always in the long run he had got what he greatly desired.

And now it did not look as if things were going

to work out that way! He found himself desiring something that was already in the possession of someone else—for "better or worse, for richer or poorer!" He who had made up his mind never to have a wife and baby of his own, was now hankering to take possession of the wife and baby of someone else! The thing was ridiculous of course. It was so silly that he could even laugh at it himself.

"What a fool I should look carting Stannard's baby round the world. Blow that Aimée! After all, if I'm going to be a nurse-maid, surely I can get a baby of my own to mind!"

Yes, he could laugh and gibe at it himself, but even in the act of doing so something gripped him round the heart and made him feel physically sick. It was the thought of the day when he would see the Amber Eyes no more! Wherefore he gazed into them all that day as much as decency permitted, and a trifle over. He was overjoyed to see that she could no longer return his gaze with her frank, disarming glance of girlish innocence. A bird sang in his breast every time the colour sprang into her cheek under his hardy eye.

She had got another nurse-boy for the baby and so had a little liberty in which to roam about Beira, looking at the coolie curio-shops, and riding on the

trollies that ran up and down the town. She bought herself an Indian silk shirt of delicate rainbow tints softly blending into one another, and he acquired a set of six twisted gold bangles for an imaginary sister, and a little one for Aimée. Then he wanted to give Amber Eyes a little black ebony walking-stick knobbed and tipped with ivory. But she would not have it.

"Not even a little remembrance of our journey down?" he pleaded.

"It looks like a *memento mori*," she protested.

"It will be one if you use it to walk away from me."

"I am able to do that without the use of a crutch," she laughed.

"I daresay. What you are *not* able to do is to prevent me from following, even if I have to come on crutches."

"Surely you are too clever a man to waste your time?"

She turned away from him with a bright cheek, leaving no time for a response. Not that he had a response ready. He was not quite sure whether he *was* a clever man or not, nor whether he stood on his head or his heels. But he meant to keep his balance. And he did—right up to nine o'clock that night.

At that time he was seated beside her in a trolley car which also contained half a dozen other people bent on a moonlight drive. The little bag she carried slipped to the floor and in stooping to recover it for her in the contracted space his face touched her knee whereon lay her hand. Under an uncontrollable impulse he pressed his lips to it. She instantly drew it away, and they sat in silence for a moment. Then, below the noise of the trolley wheels she heard his voice very low and vibrating:

"Amber, I love you!"

She stared straight ahead, making no kind of response. He was left to wonder whether or not she had heard, and obliged to assume an air of calm he did not feel. A little of the red had slipped out of his complexion before they reached the end of the drive, but also his jaw had taken on its most dogged look, and as they all dismounted and began to stroll towards the hotel he said with the quiet deliberation of the man who means to have his way:

"Walk down to the little bridge with me, please. I must speak to you."

"It is getting late," she demurred.

"I shall not keep you long."

They walked in silence, their feet slipping and

slithering in the loose sand, until they reached the bridge; then stopped to lean on the low parapet and stare down at the water just below.

"You heard what I said in the car?" he asked.

Perhaps she thought he was addressing the fishes for she made no answer. Then very quietly he said again:

"I love you, Amber!"

There was a great stillness between them. Truly as the wise people of old held, to give a man the use of your name is to give him power over you! He felt that he had power over her and perhaps that was why her hand lying on the bridge rail trembled, though her voice was quite level.

"Why do you call me by that name, Mr. Bettington?"

"Because I love you, woman with the amber eyes, and the amber hair, and the clear amber heart," he said gently and strongly, and took her hands in his. "And I think that you love me."

"You are mistaken," she said coldly, drawing away her hands.

The light went out of his face like a quenched flame. He turned away and leaned heavily on the bridge. She continued calmly:

"You merely have for me the terrible charm that

a bad man has for a woman when he is the first bad man she has ever known."

"Me?" cried Bettington, forgetting dignity and grammar and everything else in genuine astonishment. "I'm not bad! I like that! What about Stannard?"

She seemed flabbergasted for a moment, then:

"How generous you are!" she said scornfully. "Besides he is not really a bad man, only a weak one."

"One bad man is worth forty weak ones," averred Bettington bitterly. He was astonished and indignant at the line the conversation had taken.

"I do not deny that there is much good in you," she said more kindly. "I can never forget how kind you have been on the journey down. When I think of all the things you did for me and Aimée I hardly know how to thank you."

"Don't try," he interrupted. "I did nothing any man wouldn't have done for you."

He had to gulp all the same, thinking of Aimée and her bottles and her bag of impedimenta.

"And now you spoil it all," she said sorrowfully. "By taking me for one of those hateful, disloyal women to whom any man may make love the moment she is out of her husband's sight!"

"In all humility I beg you to forgive me," said Bettington.

There was no doubt about it that for once in his life he was getting the worst of it, but somehow he minded that fact less than he minded the tightening grip round his heart. In grim earnest, now, he heard "the tolling of Life's curfew" bidding them to part, and he wondered what he should do with the rest of his life. She had not quite finished rubbing his nose in the dust.

"How can I forgive you? I should not consider myself worthy of the worst or weakest man in the world if I were such a woman as you thought."

But Bettington's nose was too sore for any further ill-treatment. His natural combativeness began to reassert itself.

"I didn't think anything," he said moodily. "I just couldn't help loving you, that's all. If you want me to abase myself any more, Amber, say so, and I'll do it. But that won't prevent me from going on loving you."

She intimated with great dignity that she wished nothing further of him but the courtesy of his escort back to the hotel. They returned in silence, but at the door of the stoep, just as she was on the point of going in, she said quietly:

"I may as well tell you that my name is Juliet. Amber is my sister's name."

That was the last straw! He went away raging. How could he have wasted the golden treasure of his heart on her? She was one of those cold-blooded brutes of women who think they can do anything they like with men—(instead of letting men do anything they like with them!). He thought he should never feel better again, except after a bottle of Guinness's mixed with a pint of champagne. But even that had a less satisfactory effect than usual.

. . . . . .

No sign of her for the greater part of next day, and discreet inquiry of Rupee, the new nurse-boy, elicited the fact that she was resting with a bad headache. For some occult reason the information cheered Bettington wonderfully. The steamer that was to take them all down to Durban arrived, and he and some of the warrior men went down to choose their cabins for the next day's departure. Bettington knew the Captain well, and accepted an invitation to lunch. He had a sort of feeling that by so doing he was scoring off the falsely-called Amber. She should see that though she didn't want him somebody else did, —if it was only the Captain of a Union-Castle

liner. He knew the feeling was childish, but he had it all the same.

When he got back to the hotel, there she was sitting in the verandah. She went on writing her letters and pretended not to see him, so he got a newspaper and pretended to read it. This state of affairs continued for a long time, until an interruption came in the shape of a Cape cart with four spanking mules which pulled up before the hotel. A little hardy blue-eyed woman descended, and Bettington immediately recognised in her a lady whom he knew very well. She was the wife of a South African railway contractor, and the Madame Sans Gêne of Salisbury, from whence she and her husband had evidently just driven in their own conveyance. She did not see Bettington at once, but pounced on Amber Eyes and shook her hand vigorously.

"How do, Miss van Rimmel? We came through Umtali and I saw your sister, Mrs. Stannard. She loaded me with loving messages for you. I also have a parcel for the baby. Hope she's fit?"

"Ah! Thank you," cried Amber Eyes, and looked over the other woman's shoulder to where Bettington stood with mouth open and eyes starting in his head. "My sister's baby is very

well. I had such excellent help with her on the way down."

"Good! Mrs. Stannard was rather anxious as to how you would manage. Stan is getting along fine, and they hope to join you and Aimée in Durban much sooner than they expected. Hullo, Bet! What *you* doing here?"

Bettington came forward and made such genuflections as were expected of him. His eyes had resumed their normal position, and his mouth was now trimmed with a sarcastic smile. But it is fair to say that the sarcasm was at his own expense. When Mrs. Paulton had gone in and left them alone, he said gravely:

"I hope it gave you great pleasure to make a fool of me?"

"To do one's duty should always be pleasant," she responded with a ghost of a smile in her eye.

"Do you think you played quite fair?"

"Do you think *you* did? Because I look like my sister, and borrow her Panama, and wear her bangle, are those any reasons why you should take me for a married woman—and a disloyal one at that?"

Bettington had to take his medicine like a man. The best he could do was to mutter with a pious eye that he "thanked God she was not."

"I thank God too," she said inflexibly. But a little later she added more kindly:

"Perhaps we both rather meanly took advantage of private information."

"I don't know what inexpiable things you could have heard about me?" he asked reproachfully, secure in a sense of self-righteousness.

"When I persuaded my sister to let me go at the last moment instead of herself, Mr. Randal gave me a brief résumé of your character and career. No doubt he thought it might interest me to know something of the man whose waggon I was to share."

Ah! He almost wished he had time to go back to Umtali for a few days. Yet he really could not feel very mad with Randal or anyone else. Life looked so beguilingly fair all at once. His heart was light as a cork, but he pitched his voice to a becomingly humble key.

"Don't you think we might begin again from quite a new basis?" he asked, looking at her with all the arrogance gone out of his eyes. "Without remembering any secret information or old scores?"

She considered a little while with downcast eyes, and a faint flush in her cheek. At last:

"All right," she said softly. Then added

reflectively: "Aimée will want a lot of looking after on the voyage."

But Bettington's spirit was not quite broken.

"No!" he said clearly and firmly, "I bar Aimée."

"She *is* rather a little reptile," said Aimée's aunt.

Progress

Progress

OLD Nick Retief sat on his stoep gazing at the six thousand morgen of naked veld that constituted his share of the world, and there was trouble in his eagle-like gaze. He had the peculiar Boer eye, a vague light-blue feature sheathed with puckered skin, capable of seeing a tremendous distance, and apparently always searching for sheep in some far-off bush.

His undulating acres were composed for the most part of pasturage and poor pasturage at that. The rocky soil just escaped being "sour veld," but was grey with rhenoster bush and dotted by countless yellow patches of stink-boschie. Sugar-bush too, that signal of unfertile land was more plentiful than propitious. Only about one hundred morgen were sufficiently rich to produce forage for the beasts, and there were no fruit lands except for an orchard of ancient apricot trees, and a little orange grove that nestled in a sheltered kloof near the river.

A poor enough place from the point of view of the wealthy Paarl or Worcester-district farmers with their vineyards of rich black soil and river pasturage. But to Nick Retief it had no parallel among the beauty spots of the earth.

On the sun-baked, wind-swept farm, bare of trees except for a line of blue gums before the house, a few clusters of pomegranate, and an old *kameeldorn* down by the goat kraal—the big blonde old Boer had been bred and reared, and in turn had bred and reared his family. After his brooding inarticulate fashion, he loved its bareness and bleakness, the wide loneliness of it, and above all the deep silences that from day to day were unbroken save by the purling of the river, the voices of his "boys" busy at their tasks, or the lowing of homing cattle.

He had never seen the sea, this old Boer of the back-veld, though (as the crow flew) it broke against the coast not more than eighty miles away. The purple mountains had no call for him, nor the busy town any lure like the lure of this unsheltered, whitewashed homestead on the flatlands. In him still brooded something of the spirit of the old Voor-trekkers who trekked for the love of getting away from their fellow-men, and pitched their homes on the open plain with water

at their backs and a vast emptiness before them; and to those who broke uninvited upon the silences or intruded on the empty plain, woe betided!

That was the trouble with old Nick Retief. Someone was threatening to intrude on his land and break the spell of its silent loneliness. But it was not an enemy whom he could pot at from behind his laagered waggons, nor a dozen enemies. It was the Government of his country, bent on the business of laying down steel rails that would enable locomotive-engines to tear screaming and belching, back and forth between the Transvaal and the Cape. And ever since he had got the news of it, Nick had cursed the "*slegté* Government of red necks" on his rising up and at his lying down, and always his slow-moving brain pondered heavily on how he could outwit it and prevent the abominable outrage.

He did not approve of trains, and considered it his duty as a good Boer to resist such inventions of the Devil to the last ditch. He would give them a good fight if they were looking for it, those *slegté skepsels!* It was his land not theirs, and right was on his side. He would prove that to them, and win out in the fight, even if it took every-one of the thousand golden sovereigns covered over with loose bran and hidden in a paraffin tin

under his wife's bed. Never should they have his permission to come digging and blasting within a few hundred yards of his stoep! The thought was enough to make his wife, old Tanta Christina, turn in her grave over there by the *klompje* of pomegranates, and bring the two tall sons who rested beside her forth to join in the fray with the *verdommeder* etceteras.

The first intimation he had received of the evil business was an official letter informing him that the Government had decided that the railway must pass through his land, and requiring him to appoint a valuer to meet and agree with the official valuer as to compensation. To this old Nick had written, or caused to be written—for he was one of those old-time Boers whose literary accomplishments went no further than the ability to sign his name with a laboured flourish—an infuriated reply, rejecting the Government, its valuers, and all that pertained unto the scheme. A second letter from Cape Town decorated with many red seals, contained an official proposal to buy the property known as "Jackalsfontein," and an inquiry as to what price its owner set upon said property. The reply to this was brief to rudeness. The farm was not in the market and its owner was not selling at any price.

To-day had come the third letter, a frigid document, firm and arrogant as only Governments secure in unlimited power dare be—and the burden of it was that whether the owner of Jackalsfontein liked it or not the Government was going to run a railway across his land. The survey work would proceed, and if Mr. Retief objected he was at liberty to seek redress in the courts of his country. It was over this letter that the old man sat brooding in the morning sunshine, eyes on the distant sheep, one gnarled, knobbly hand lying clenched on the arm of his chair, the other hanging straight down almost touching the ground, thumb in the bowl of his pipe. His immense bulk of brawn and fat was clothed in garments cut and sewn by the fingers long since peacefully at rest beneath the pomegranates. The trousers were as two enormous drain pipes that hung suspended from above his middle in the straight lines abhorred of Nature; circling round his generous waist they sprayed out in a wide V over his stomach where the two top buttons failed to collaborate with the buttonholes. His short but roomy coat could easily have accommodated a second man of his size, and over his cotton shirt he wore instead of waistcoat his flowing beard—a tangled grey-brown affair tousled by many a south-

easter, and somewhat recalling certain lines of Edward Lear's:

> "It is as I feared,
> Two cocks and a hen, one owl and a wren,
> Have all made their home in my beard!"

On his feet were home-made veld-schoens of raw-hide, "breyed" to the softness of suède with toes cut square as the nose of a punt.

From within the house could be heard at intervals a little snatch of song, like the chirp of a cheerful bird flying from bough to bough. At last in the doorway appeared Chrissie Retief, daughter and only remaining child of the family, a blithe good-looking girl between eighteen and twenty years of age. She addressed her father in the *taal* speaking reproachfully:

"Ach! Sis, Pa! you still fretting there over that old Government letter?"

He turned his vague ruminating eyes on her.

"The dogs shall never bring their stink-machines across my land."

"What can *you* do then, my poor Poppa? They *will* bring them here, and you can't do anything. You can't shoot them with a gun, or throw them with a stone."

"I will fight them with the law—if it takes my last pound," muttered Nick.

"What's the good? They will win in the end, Governments always do," said Chrissie who had been to school at Paarl, and knew a few things.

"We'll see. I'll go to Piquetberg to-morrow and talk to old Frickie de Villiers. He's a *slim kerel*, and ought to be able to *vernuck* them if anyone can. What is the use of my tin full of money if I can't get the better of the dogs?"

"Ach toch! What's the good of fretting your blood then, Pa? Let them make their old railway. We shall see something then, but."

"*Allemagtage!* Are you a child of mine?" the old man roared. His vague eyes were suddenly fierce and full of fire. But Chrissie was not of the kidney to be intimidated even by her father. She turned away with a trill of laughter, finger on lip, to listen to a bird that had just perched on a branch of the kameeldorn and was calling out in three high insistent notes:

"Bock-bock-mackeerie! Bock-bock-mackeerie!"

It was the South African whip-poor-will whose cry heralds the arrival of strangers.

"The bock-mackeerie!" cried Chrissie ecstatically.

She was young enough to be keen for excitement

in any shape or form and would not have objected to making coffee ten times a day for passing strangers. Anything that broke the monotony of life at Jackalsfontein was welcome to her. She put her hand across her eyes, blue as forget-me-nots, and looked into the distance, hoping for the sight of an approaching Cape cart. The roundness of her upraised arm strained the seams of her cotton sleeve, and a pretty curve from bust to waist and waist to heel was visible if there had been any eye to admire it. Her print dress was badly cut and the pattern faded from much banging on river stones. But there is nothing so difficult to hide as a good figure. Chrissie had got hers from riding astride, bareback, on young fillies and calves, and swimming in the river. The physical-culture mistress at Paarl had put a finishing touch by teaching her the value of poise and controlled muscles. Small wonder that the solitude of Jackalsfontein did not appeal to her as much as to her father. She was still in the romping, young-animal stage when she needed other young creatures to romp with. It was a dull life for the girl.

"I see something, Pa! There is something coming," she cried suddenly, and gave a skip of excitement.

"Ach!" The old man spat scornfully, took from his pocket a stumpy bit of rolled tobacco, pitch-black in colour, and began to cut it into shreds using the palm of his hand for the operation. The stoep table was dark with tobacco juice and roughened by innumerable tiny cuts from this very business of tobacco cutting; but he always used his hand when he was pre-occupied.

His vague eyes had long ago, at three miles' distance, distinguished that which Chrissie now descried crawling up the sloping land in clouds of red dust.

"A flock of sheep," she reported, "about fifty. —Some goats— Eight cows, two little calves, three mules——"

"A herd of rubbish belonging to that *pat-looper*[1] Carol Uys, sure as a gun," grunted old man Retief.

"It looks like his Kaffir Jim driving them," Chrissie agreed. "And there is a man on horseback coming up behind."

"The *pat-looper* himself no doubt. Coming to try and sell his broken-down beasts to me."

"Ach! Pa, you know you got the red heifer from him, and that pair of mules Farnie Roos offered you £30 for last week."

[1] Road-footer.

"*Maar!* They were not worth £30 when I took them from Carol Uys."

"No, and you did not give him £30 for them! Sis, Pa, you must be fair, then, but!"

Chrissie's eye was sparkling. She could not keep her feet still. She was entranced at the prospect of seeing Carol Uys, who was one of her suitors. He was the least prosperous of them, and her father was always crying out upon him, for a *pat-looper* because he had to augment his poor income by going about and doing a little cattle dealing, but she liked him better than Piet van der Merwe, or big Farnie Roos. She was not in love with any of them, but she was very much in love with love and life, was Chrissie, and could not help a little bubble of pleasure welling up from her heart and escaping from her lips in a girlish laugh as she turned back into the house. A jolly-out-of-doors, healthy girl, chock-full of animal spirits and laughter and fun. One of the kind that old mother Nature has her eye on for purposes of her own!

It was dark and cool inside the house, for Jackalsfontein, as in all decent Boer farms, had every door and window closed tight at six in the morning and not opened again until six in the evening, this being the Boer method of keeping out the

scorching heat of summer. And a very good method too.

In her bedroom, Chrissie proceeded to tidy her crisp blonde hair which was always perfectly tidy, and tie a broad piece of blue ribbon round her neck in such fashion that a fascinating bow was under her hair and the two ends of it stuck out behind each ear making her eyes look so much bluer that they resembled two bits of radiant sky studding her merry face. For some time she meditated over a large silver locket with a flying crane engraved on it, and containing a tin-type photo of her mother. She usually wore this on Sundays, suspended by a black ribbon round her neck, and was aware that it lent great *chic* to her appearance.

In the end, she decided not to wear it upon this occasion for fear her father should notice and ask her in front of Carol why she had it on. Not for the world would she have had Carol think that she titivated herself for him.

At length, the sound of wheels grating in front of the house made her fly from her glass to the kitchen on the business of preparing coffee for the newcomer. For no matter how unwelcome the caller at a Boer house may be, he is always offered the hospitality of the country—a cup of coffee.

With her own hands, Chrissie set out the bright tin beakers on the table of the *Eat-kammer*, and piled high a plate of sweet hard rusks. Then opening the front door, she stepped once more into the sunshine.

And, after all, it was not Carol Uys who stood there mopping the beads from his brow with a white handkerchief, and talking to old man Retief. It was a stranger with that red burn on his face and neck which only Britishers seem to achieve in the South African climate, and which long ago won for them the nick-name of "rooi-neks."

At the sight of him, Chrissie became shy and stood poised on one foot like a bird ready to take wing. It seemed she had arrived at an unpropitious moment. The old man's eyes were suffused with blood and his fist lay on the table as though he had just banged it down there. His jaw stuck out aggressively. The stranger's jaw also stuck out, but his hazel eyes had a cool, collected stare in them. This he transferred to Chrissie and removed his hat with the usual Dutch greeting.

"*Dag Mevrow.*"

She responded, and poised herself on the other foot for a change. After a moment, as old Retief put his pipe in his mouth and made no attempt at an introduction, the stranger continued, speaking

with an air of quiet assurance to which her various Boer swains had not accustomed Chrissie.

"Miss Retief?"

She nodded.

"My name is Richard Braddon and I am the engineer in charge of the railway-laying party. I'm trying to persuade your father that it is of no use kicking against the Government. He'd far better let us go about the business quietly."

"And I tell you you had better save your breath," snorted Nick, "and keep off my land or I'll blow you off from the barrel of my old Mauser."

The young man's red skin grew a shade redder, but he smiled dryly:

"I'm afraid I'll have to risk that, Mr. Retief, when the time comes."

Chrissie secretly approved the I-don't-give-a-damn-for-you-and-your-old-Mauser way in which he said it. That was something to say to old Nick Retief all the same! She turned on her father now expostulating:

"Foy toch, Poppa! It is not his fault, then. He has to do what the Government tells him, but!"

"I'm not going to have the stink-engines on my land," repeated Nick.

"Well," said Braddon pleasantly. "Let's leave

it at that. I'm camped out on Diepner's land now beyond the river but we may get orders to start the bridge any time—and then the rails on this side— I only want you to be reasonable, Mr. Retief, and realise that it isn't our fault."

Nick rolled a blood-suffused eye on him.

"You start on my land, that's all," he said with heavy significance.

A minute later, he let out a terrific roar that shook the rafters of the verandah above him and was addressed to the native who had recently arrived with the sheep and cows.

"What is the matter with you, you base-born son of a baboon, that you put your master's scabby, leprous sheep into my calves' kraal when I told you they were to go into that one down by the sluit?"

Following this furious inquiry he arose and betook himself to the kraal, leaving Chrissie and Braddon together.

"Will you drink coffee?" she asked.

"Thank you, I'd like some very much."

She opened the door and went to fetch the beakers and rusks out on the stoep table. Braddon immediately bestirred himself to her assistance, proving himself still further unlike her several

swains, for among the more ignorant class of Boers it is the affair of the women to wait upon men as upon the lords of the earth.

Afterwards, the two sat down by the table and waited for the old man. Braddon made polite conversation. He felt no embarrassment, but neither did he feel much interest. He had met Dutch girls before and they had not "gone to his head" or to his heart either. Their complexions were invariably good, but as conversationalists they were draggy.

"It must be dull for you living out here," he remarked pleasantly.

"Oh, no," she answered smiling, "there is plenty of work to do on the farm."

He liked that spirit and understood it.

"I know. When one is working time flies, doesn't it? But there are occasional dull hours in the evenings I find."

"What do you do then?" she asked.

"Oh, study a bit and read the newspaper when I have one, and write home sometimes—and think a lot."

"What do you think about?" pursued Chrissie.

"Oh, I don't know—work, and my people at home, there's always something."

He examined her with a shade more interest.

She was not so draggy after all, this Dutch girl. Certainly he had known them duller.

"What do *you* think about?" he asked with a quizzical smile.

"I think about the people who come to the farm," said Chrissie simply.

He looked up as if at a call. It was not so much her words, in fact, he was not sure *what* it was that gave him a mental jump, but the impression was as startling as if she had taken a little hammer and hit a nail into him hard, only that no pain attached to the proceeding. She had risen, and was busying herself with the coffee-pot. He became aware for the first time of charming contours that could not be concealed by an old print frock. Also, that she moved better than most girls of her class; that her hair was becomingly done; and that the ribbon round her throat lent an added note of colour to her eyes. A glint came into his own eye, but Chrissie's face was as demure as the face of a Greuze milkmaid. It is to be feared, however, that her heart was less naïve than her remark. The fact is, Chrissie was a natural-born flirt and knew perfectly well what she was about. She sugared the coffee with eyelashes brushing her cheek, biting her under-lip a little as if that helped to concentrate her attention

on the task. Certainly it gave Braddon an opportunity of observing how white and even were those same teeth. Her nails too were daintily trimmed. Indeed she was a surprise he had never expected to find at Jackalsfontein, and what he could not understand was *why* the fact was only just dawning upon him. Certainly she was quite unlike all the other girls he had met on his trips into out-lying districts. He wondered what had made him think she would be draggy.

The strap of a case he wore slung round his shoulders chafed him and he unbuckled it and put a camera beside him on the table. Chrissie's glance immediately seized on it.

"You take photographs?"

"Yes—do you?"

She shook her head, her accomplishments did not run to that.

"I only wish I could."

"I could soon teach you."

She laughed and blushed a little, leaning her round face on one shapely hand. He thought what a jolly picture she would make and the thought was father to the desire.

"Will you let me take a photograph of you?"

"Yes," she said eagerly. "Quickly, before Poppa comes back."

It was the work of an instant. He snapped twice in case of a failure, then closed the camera and put it away.

"Will you send me one?"

"Or bring it, if you will allow me. I am only a few miles off."

Chrissie made no response to this but looked into her coffee cup as though it were a crystal ball in which she could read the future.

"I am sorry Mr. Retief should feel so badly about the railway," said Braddon at last. "It's got to come whether he likes it or not."

"That's what I tell him."

"You are not against us then, Miss Retief?"

Old Nick lumbering back to his chair perhaps prevented her from expressing any opinion on the matter, but she slid Braddon a blue glance that seemed to be an answer to several things besides his question. The old man, who had not recovered his temper, continued to smoke in gloomy silence like a smouldering fire ready to burst into flame at the least puff of wind. Braddon made an effort at conciliation by proffering an inquiry or two as to farming affairs generally, but met with no marked success.

"How goes it with the sheep, Oom?" Oom

Nick glowered at him for some time before grunting a response.

"The sheep are a *beetje* thin."

Braddon essayed another throw.

"How goes it with the land?"

After a long silence.

"The land is a *beetje* dry."

This was melancholy. Braddon, about to conclude with the usual polite query: "How goes it with the wife?" caught a swift glance from Chrissie and was reminded that he had heard of the old man being a widower of long standing.

"How goes it with the fruit?" he ventured instead.

"The fruit is a *beetje* behind-time."

Nick looked gloomily towards his apricot orchard. Chrissie having piloted Braddon past a bad place was now smiling down her retroussé nose. He was considering the matter of moving on when someone else entered upon the scene. Old Retief had seen the Cape cart coming long since but, according to his wont, said nothing. The others were too much occupied with their own thoughts to notice anything, until the dust of Carol Uys's trap blew over them from the loose ground in front of the stoep.

"*Dag*, Oom!"

"*Dag*, Carol!"

The thin long-legged young Boer descended from his cart, fastened the pole of it to a staple driven into one of the blue-gum trees and came up the stoep steps. He was a pleasant-faced fellow about six feet three inches in height but of rather slight build. Chrissie had always liked his gentle eyes and gentle ways inherited from some far-off Huguenot ancestor, but to-day she noticed for the first time that he walked flat-footed and that the toe of one of his shoes pointed east and the other west. For the first time too she was not impatient at her father's off-hand, rather scornful manner of greeting him. Old Retief despised the Uys clan, lock, stock, and barrel, because they were bad farmers. In fact though they lived on farms they were no farmers at all. Everyone knew it. An Uys farm was always farthest away from the markets and always pushed away in the corner of some mountainous kloof where the grazing was sour for the beasts and the land would grow nothing. Naturally there was nothing for the sons of such a farmer to do to make ends meet but take to transport riding or cattle dealing. And the truth was that the Uys taste lay that way—that was what old Retief had against them. They were horsey men,

fonder of the road than the roof-tree, men who would sooner ride a hundred miles to deal for a pair of goats than do one day's work at the tail of a plough. Retief despised such shiftless wanderers and wanted nothing of the sort for a son-in-law. Wherefore Carol Uys was none too welcome at Jackalsfontein. However, the handshaking that ensued was hearty enough and Chrissie, with heightened colour, poured coffee for the newcomer, and fresh cups all round.

"Well? What broken-down old crocks have you got with you to-day, Carol?" asked the old man grimly.

Uys waved his hand at the two handsome bays with black manes and tails, harnessed to the cart.

"Look then! They speak for themselves Oom. As smart a pair of Cape horses as you will see from here to Johannesburg. The very thing to drive Miss Chrissie to *kerk* with on Sunday."

Needless to say Retief had passed a shrewd eye over them long since and come to his own conclusions. His business now was to conceal those conclusions, which happened to be favourable, behind a contemptuous smile and such sarcasm as he could muster. No very great amount!

"I'm not on the look-out for grandparents for

those I have to take Chrissie to church with already!" he remarked.

"Ah! Oom Nick must not make jokes about those bays," expostulated Carol seriously. "They are Clan-William horses—three-year olds. Why, they haven't whistled yet [cut their baby-teeth]. Oompie can look in their mouths and see."

"*Mastag!* It is hard enough to see them at all, they are so *maar* [thin]!"

Carol aggrieved, turned to Chrissie.

"No one could call them *maar*. It is a dry season and I haven't been able to get them much forage by the way, but no one can call them *maar*."

"How much do you want for them?" asked Braddon.

"Sixty pounds apiece, not a sixpence less," declared Carol. "Don't you think I'm right, Miss Chrissie?"

Chrissie, with her father's eye on her, knew better than to respond.

"Hundred and twenty the pair! A stiff price," remarked the engineer.

"Not too stiff. Oom Nick knows the value of a good horse and is able to pay it," said Carol firmly. He may have been no farmer but he knew his business as a horse-seller.

"Their feet are too soft for this veld," grumbled old Retief.

"Not a bit of it, Oom. Clan-William horses are hard-veld horses—iron feet and mouths of velvet. You know it good enough."

"Well, and what's the matter with my own horses that I drive to *kerk* every Sunday?" asked Nick Retief aggressively.

"Oom, they are not bad horses. I'm not saying they are bad horses, but they are five years old and don't match—you know they don't match. One has got a *bless* [white blaze down forehead] and the other has a white foot."

This hit the old man hard. That bless and white foot had been his bane for many a day.

"Oompie mustn't drive to church like that any longer," said Carol decisively. "It is unlucky."

"Ah! unlucky? I am unlucky enough," glowered Oom Nick and reflected awhile in his beard while Carol drank more coffee and looked at Chrissie with his brown eyes which became very gentle and shy the moment he was not discussing horses. Chrissie inquired for his mother and sisters and brothers, naming each separately. Braddon tattooed the table, bored and vaguely irritated. At last, the old man got up and went down to the horses and began examining them

minutely from mouth to hoof, jeering all the time and expostulating with Uys who had followed him.

The engineer and Chrissie left alone sat a long time in silence apparently listening to the haggling and jeering below them, but in reality listening to queer little drumlike sounds going on within themselves.

"May I bring you the photo when it is finished?" Braddon said at last in a low voice.

She laughed her little bubbling laugh.

"You see how it is with Poppa—he does not like the railway."

He looked at her steadily.

"You mean I will not be welcome here?"

"*Poppa* will not welcome you," said Chrissie with the Greuze look. "Have another cup of coffee?"

Her father and Uys were returning to the stoep. Evidently some arrangement had been come to, but they were still haggling.

"Come on, Oom, you don't want that red ox, now, it will pair with one I have and that will let you off another five pounds. Then I will take your old bays for £55 and you will have only to pay me £40 cash."

"Forty cash!" complained Nick. "It is too much."

"No, no, Uncle. It is not too much—you know

that good enough. I couldn't sell for less, even to Miss Chrissie's father."

He looked with his shy brown eyes at the girl and she smiled back. Braddon got up quickly.

"Well, I must go. Good-bye, Oom."

The old man scowled at him but shook hands.

"Good-day, *kerel*."

"Good-day, Miss Retief."

"Good-day, Mr. Braddon."

Perhaps some subtle message passed from her hand to his for his eyes cleared. He went down from the stoep, untied his horse, and mounted. It was a good horse and he sat on it as only a born rider can sit. If Chrissie's good figure could not be hidden neither could Braddon's horsemanship, and that is an accomplishment which Boer girls, in common with most other girls, admire. He was well aware of Chrissie's glance fixed upon him as he rode away, swaying easily and gracefully in his saddle. He was not quite sure why the fact was so pleasing to him, but he whistled a gay little air, and the world looked a good place to him, and life much more attractive than it had looked an hour ago.

. . . . . .

Six months later, Nick Retief sat again on his stoep gazing with sombre eyes before him. At a

casual glance all seemed unchanged, but a trained observer would have detected two profound differences: the landscape was no longer naked, and the old Boer had grown markedly older.

His beard and hair showed great patches of white amidst their shaggy sandiness, the old eyes were bloodshot and full of strain, the folds of skin sheathing them reddened and weary. It was the sight they looked upon that made them weary: a line of tents not five hundred yards from the stoep, some tin shanties, huge piles of sleepers and rails, and a trail of pitched-up rocks and yellowy-grey earth. The gangers were at work on the business of bridging the Kat River and laying the railway line across Jackalsfontein.

The old veld eyes that stared at that hated sight had seen many strange things since the morning when Braddon made his first appearance at Jackalsfontein. At last they had looked upon the sea, and the ships upon it, and the men that go in the ships; upon tram-cars and hansom cabs and streets crowded with fashionable women. Incidentally they had seen the inside of a Law Court, not once but many times.

On six several occasions Nick had donned his black stove-pipe hat and driven the Clan-William bays acquired from Carol Uys to Piquetberg and

been accompanied from thence to Cape Town by Frickie de Villiers the *slim*. But all the sights his eyes had there beheld brought him no solace, nor a passing thrill of interest. He had been at grapples with the Government; absorbed in the great fight to keep silent and naked the acres that he loved. And the Government had defeated him. The railway had come!

Money had flowed like water, and it was not Government money. Little was now left of the original £2000 that once had lain snug in the paraffin tin under the bed of the defunct Mrs. Retief. To drag a case from the ordinary courts to the Supreme Court of the land and from thence to appeal to the House of Assembly does not cost nothing. Neither do the services of such *slim* ones of the earth as Frickie de Villiers, and a firm of Cape Town solicitors (who were Frickie's cousins) and, finally, an eminent Q. C. (who was Frickie's uncle) cost nothing. Nothing costs nothing when it comes to meddling with the law. Nick knew this now to his cost. Knew too that governments can be vindictive as well as arrogant. He had never heard of such a person as Lord Chesterfield, but of one Chesterfieldism at least he was now in a position to prove the truth:

"Never quarrel with large bodies or societies:
Individuals sometimes forgive; societies never do."

Instead of awarding him the compensation originally suggested for Jackalsfontein the Government had set a fresh brace of men to the task of assessment, with disastrous results for Nick. These officials, practical men with no fantastic illusions about the value of rock veld, rhenoster shrub, and stink-boschie, had written Jackalsfontein down for the poorest kind of cattle land. Such land is dirt cheap in South Africa, and the Government was well within its rights in paying for it at dirt-cheap rates. What was worse, it would pay for no more than was absolutely needed to lay a narrow track of steel rails. The land that lay on either side of the fenced-off track, Nick was informed he could keep. That these wire fences would cut the farm in two thereby lessening its value, and that the nearest crossing gates were to be erected three miles away, was Nick's misfortune, part of the reward he had reaped for "quarrelling with large bodies."

At any rate, it was all over now. Nick had eaten and drunk of Justice, grace had been said, and it was finished. The iron heel of the Law had him down in the dust. Nothing more for the old

farmer to do but sit in the sunshine and watch the ridge of pitched-up earth creep over his land. His eyes were weary, but his heart was like a red-hot stone in his side.

He no longer worked. The management of the farm had devolved entirely on Chrissie, and though she was no fool, the burden of care and responsibility weighed heavily on her shoulders.

So absorbed was the old man in this business of watching that he appeared to have forgotten everything else. He came out in the dawn and sat through the unsheltered day in his reimpje chair. Sometimes even after night-fall he sat on, staring through the darkness until the camp lights died out and all was wrapped in silence. Then he would lift up his great bulk and shamble heavily to bed.

And with each day his bulk seemed to grow greater. It was not a wasting sickness, this sickness he had of hate and rage. Chrissie noticed on the day of his last return from Cape Town, that he had assumed a curious resemblance to her mother in the latter stages of her illness. Old Tanta Christina had died of dropsy, and the girl sometimes wondered sadly whether the same disease, common amongst Boers, would snatch away her father. But though he grew swollen and visibly

stouter there was none of the transparent whiteness which accompanies dropsy. Rather his colouring was red and purple, almost as if a fire, flaming within, boiled the very blood in his veins, bloating out his body and blearing his eyes. There were hours when Chrissie had a childish fear that he would burst. These were usually the hours when the gangers were at work with dynamite.

For the engineer and his gang were not finding the affair of bridging the river and laying the rails across Jackalsfontein any too easy to accomplish. The rocks, concerning whose presence the valuers had been so explicit, justified their existence by appearing in places where they could best have been dispensed with. Dynamiting went on three times a day, and three times a day men fled in every direction for shelter. Once, during the first days they ran to the farm, but no more than once. The grim man sitting so quiet in his armchair frightened them. There was something awe-inspiring about that big figure and the sombre, vigilant glance of the bloodshot eyes. A superstitious Irish navvy declared that the farmer possessed the evil eye and had put the black curse of Ballyshane on them all.

It is true that an extraordinary number of

accidents had distinguished the rail-laying operations since Diepner's land had been left for Retief's. Scarcely a day passed without witnessing the sight of a trolley carrying off some injured ganger to the Cape Town Hospital.

Those in charge too, had experienced trouble. Three different engineers had come and gone since the commencement of the bridge. First, Braddon, after waiting for two months on the Diepner side of the river, had barely settled his men on the Retief side, when he went down with enteric and had to be trollied off to the old Somerset Hospital at Cape Town. The next man broke his leg three weeks after taking charge. The third got blood-poisoning from a veld sore. A temporary man, put in charge, was called away to Kimberley by the sudden death of his wife. Now Braddon, after a long and slow convalescence, was back again.

He and Chrissie had met only twice since the date of their first acquaintance. One afternoon he had ridden over with the prints of her photograph in his pocket. Old Retief was away on his first visit to Cape Town, and a girl friend from Piquetberg had come to keep Chrissie company in her father's absence. It happened that some folk from a neighbouring farm were also visiting Jackalsfontein, and there was rather a large

gathering in the big *Eat-kammer*. The girls, merry as *mossies* in the corn, entertained their guests with coffee and cookies and there was a great deal of laughing. Mart Lategan, the Piquetberg girl, was of the giggling, hoydenish type, and if Chrissie had shown herself of the same inclination the party might have developed into rather a rowdy affair. It is easy in out-of-the-way places on the veld where there are no particular standards of conduct and the climate insidiously slackens the moral and physical muscles, to pass from unrestrained laughter to the broad jokes that distinguish social intercourse amongst the less cultivated Boers.

But about Chrissie Retief there was a new and quiet dignity that toned down the noisy humour of the others, and kept a certain sweet quality in the atmosphere, like a fresh breeze blowing through the room. It seemed as though in her father's absence she felt the honour of the house upon her shoulders, and must carry it carefully. Braddon's eye rested often on her, and though hardly any conversation passed between them that was not common with, and to, the others, their glances sometimes crossed, blended, and ended in each other's eyes. Just before he left, they were alone for a moment, and Braddon was able to produce

the photographs. She went red with pleasure, looking quickly from one pose to the other.

"Is that me, then? My! how nice I look!"

"Not nearly nice enough for you. All your lovely colouring is lost," he said, looking at her rosy cheek.

"Ach! sis, toch, Mr. Braddon, you just say those things," she murmured, casting down her lashes.

"They are true though."

"Are these both for me?" she asked shyly.

"Yes, but I have taken the liberty of keeping a print of each for myself. I hope you don't mind?"

How could she mind? But she said with her Greuze air:

"I can't think why you should want them!"

"I will tell you some day," was his last word to her, and he rode away with a smile on his lips.

The next time they had encountered out riding. Chrissie, taking a canter in the cool of the afternoon on one of the Clan-William bays, met him returning from a long day of acquiring stores in Piquetberg.

He was hot and tired and thirsty and filled with weariness; but after a few moments in her company remembered none of these things. It was as

if a tree had sprung up by the wayside, with a seat beside it to rest on, and a well of cool spring water for refreshment. There was something so alive, yet restful and assuaging about the girl. The wind had beaten a bright colour into her face, health and vitality showed in every line of her, and she was brimming over with that quality which he had recognised at their first meeting and which had turned him from a casual caller into a man who would come again. The thing had been inexplicable to him then and it was still so; but it remained a fact. It was as intangible as spirit, yet the lure of coquetry and curves and things physical was queerly mixed up with it; loyalty, and strength, and tenderness; and a certain hardness of purpose, and a hint of her father's vague shrewdness as his eye searched the bush for far-off sheep; and more than a hint of his dogged obstinacy and love of a fight.

Braddon came of a good class of people and had known in his own country many charming girls, most of them prettier, cleverer, and far more cultivated than Chrissie. Yet in her he divined this something which they had lacked. Some fire burned in her of which no spark had gleamed in them. What he did *not* know was that he had met in Chrissie one of those subtle combinations

of sweetheart-wife-and-mother which old Nature specially breeds in big wide open countries where she needs strong, hardy, lusty children to people her empty spaces. He only knew when he rode away from Chrissie Retief that day that he loved her and meant to do all he could to get her for his own.

But before they met again much was to happen. During the next few weeks, the old man's cause was clearly lost though litigation still dragged on, and orders came to Braddon to commence operations at Jackalsfontein. The political situation provided a further complication for it was 1899 and there were rumours of war in the air. The relation between Boer and Briton had long been acutely strained, but the strain was now approaching cracking-point. Negotiations between England and the Transvaal were still going forward, but it was clear that a break-down in them could be expected at any time, and the Boers, fighters by nature and inclination, and longing for another turn-up with the ancient enemy, were praying for that break-down to come. A feeling of hostility between the two races exhibited itself all over the country and in every relation of life. Braddon was aware of it when he went into Piquetberg or had any dealing with the farmers, and it betrayed

itself in constant rows between his men, who though they were mostly "coloured," took sides, and were prepared to fight for their opinions. The skilled mechanics were white men and all Britishers except for a couple of half-Dutch colonials.

Braddon was a good deal worried about Chrissie, and what attitude her father would take up in the event of his being required to accept an Englishman as his son-in-law; but fate postponed the problem for him, for a time at least, by laying her hand (with typhoid fever in it) upon him and tucking him safely away in hospital for a couple of months. Now he was back. Chrissie had not seen him with her eyes, but she knew very well that he was there.

The door opened now and she came out and stood looking sadly at her father. She too had subtly changed. Some of the bubbling youth was gone out of her; the shadows in the gay forget-me-not eyes had grown deeper; her lips tipped downwards at the corners.

The coming war between Boer and Briton had already thrown its shadow on her spirit; and too, the gloom of her father's lost law-case enveloped her as it did all else at the farm. She knew he was a ruined man, with nothing in the world but a

couple of hundred pounds, and the farm reduced to half its value. She was no longer the catch of the neighbourhood from a marriageable point of view. The two thousand pounds to which, as her father's only living child, she had been heiress was gone in litigation, leaving her just like any other poor back-veld farmer's daughter, a girl who must take the best husband she could get. Not that that worried her. It was her father's changed habit and appearance that frightened her. She looked at him now with sorrowful eyes.

"Ach! my lieber fader, don't let it turn your blood like that, then!"

She often made that remark to him, and he never took any notice, never even removed his eyes from the land, though his hand would sometimes mechanically search in his coat pocket for the stumpy roll of *tabac* and penknife.

"Won't you come in, Poppa? The sun is toch so hot out here for you!"

The front of the house in fact lay bathed in the full flood of noon-day heat. No shade of flickering blue-gum leaves sheltered it now, for the old man had cut down the row of trees level with the stoep so that no obstacle should impede a clear vision of the dirty work going forward.

"No what, I am *maar* better here," he said slowly. "I can *maar* see the scoundrels."

"Fi! my poor Poppa! what does it then do for you, but? Only makes your blood turn more and more."

"Chrissie," he said solemnly. "My blood is turned already. I feel strange in the stomach and in the head since that Judge—" He shook a great fist in the direction of the railway workings. It seemed to her that ever since that morning his hand had strangely increased in size.

"Poppa you are swelling up!" she said in awe-struck tones.

"Ja, I am not myself," he muttered dully. "It is those stink-machines—and that cursed Judge."

She sighed. It was nearly two months since the final edict had been given against him, yet here was his mind still travelling back and forth on the thing as though it had happened yesterday! The world had stood still for him! She let her gaze follow the same direction as his, putting up her hand to shelter her eyes from the glare. At the camp not more than four hundred yards away the men could be seen moving about. Some trolley loads of machinery had just come in, and the gangers were swarming over them like ants; pull-

ing at and handing down sleepers, rails, and great steel girders. A figure dressed in white ducks came out of a tent and directed the scene. At the sight of his straight back and easy walk a little wave of colour curved into the girl's cheek. Suddenly as if moved by machinery the red-shirted, grey-legged men all ran together, converging in a cluster about one spot. Some of them stooped down, others leaned over the stoopers to look at what lay on the ground. Chrissie held her breath until she saw the white-clothed man waving the others off. It was one of the red-shirted labourers who lay so still on the ground.

"There has been an accident!" she said aloud, looking at her father.

"There will be many an accident before it is finished," he muttered darkly. "God is on my side. He will make them pay with blood."

"*Maar*, Poppey, it is not the fault of those poor men! They have to earn their living, but," she expostulated. "Look, they are carrying him to a tent—now they are—" She broke off and stayed watching. It was plain that Braddon was giving certain instructions. He pointed towards the farm, and the men looked that way, but shook their heads and hung back. Then Braddon himself started for the farm with long

swinging paces. The colour waned out of Chrissie's face, leaving her very pale.

"Poppa, the engineer is coming here—you remember him?"

"Ja, I remember the *rooi-nek* good enough."

They stayed in silence then, until Braddon reached the stoep. His eyes and Chrissie's met for a moment as he stood with his hat off, but it was Retief whom he addressed.

"We have had an accident, Oom, and by bad luck not a drop of brandy in the camp. Can you let us have a little? Enough to keep the man going until we get him into hospital."

"I have brandy but not for you," was the surly response.

Braddon reddened angrily, but he knew the old man's trouble, and strove to be patient.

"Oom, it is not for me. The poor fellow's leg is broken in two places. I ask you in common humanity."

"That talk is no good here. You will get no brandy of mine."

"Sis, Poppey, then—" put in Chrissie in soft remonstrance. But Poppey turned on her bellowing like a wounded bull.

"Is this my house or yours? *Mastag!* Do I

keep brandy to pour down the throats of *rooi-neks* who steal my land?"

Braddon who had been standing with his hat off now replaced it and turned away. It was only too clear that he was wasting time. But he threw one Parthian shot over his shoulder.

"As a matter of fact it is a Dutchman who is hurt. A decent young fellow, too, of the same name as your own." He walked away.

"How can you be so cruel, Poppa, then?" cried the girl turning fiercely on her father, her eyes bright with tears and anger.

Receiving no answer she ran into the house, emerging three minutes later with a cappie on her head and a bottle in her hand. Defiantly she stood before her father.

"I am going to take him the brandy. You can beat me if you will, but I shall take the brandy."

The old man looked at her with terrible eyes but spake no word.

"He is one of us—a Retief—a Boer! It would be a shame on us if we let him perhaps die of his sufferings."

For an instant longer, she paused, her foot on the step, waiting for some relenting word from him, but he spake nothing. So she ran down the steps and across the veld after Braddon. He had

already reached the camp before she caught him up, and another man was saddling a horse to ride to Diepner's, some three miles off.

"Here is the brandy," said Chrissie breathlessly, touching his arm just as he was about to enter the tent where the injured man lay. She was very white for all her running. Braddon took the bottle from her with grateful words, and would have kept her hand, but she drew back coldly.

"I cannot shake hands with my father's enemies. It is only because the man is a Boer, like ourselves, that I have come."

The Englishman, intensely chagrined, stood staring at her a moment. Then he said abruptly:

"Wait one moment while I give Retief a dose. Do not go. I must speak to you."

While she stood hesitating, he disappeared into the tent, returning almost immediately.

"Come, I will walk back with you."

"I don't require your escort," she said rudely. "I am on my father's ground."

Nevertheless, he walked beside her as she moved quickly away.

"Chrissie!" he said quietly. "What has all this trouble about the land and about war to do with you and me?"

She did not answer, only walked faster.

"I am only an employee of the Government," he continued. "How is it my fault if they take your father's land?"

"I do not say that it is your fault," she said. "But it turns you into his enemy—and mine."

"And yours?" he repeated reproachfully, "I thought you were more just than that!"

"I am the daughter of a Boer."

"And I am an Englishman. But that does not prevent me from loving you."

He caught hold of her hands and made her stand still. They had reached a spot where the pomegranates hid them from view of the stoep.

"Do you hear, Chrissie? I love you, and I want to marry you."

"Marry an Englishman?" she cried violently. "Never. It would break my father's heart—and mine too." With a quick movement she wrenched her hands away and fled from him. He turned very pale and stood staring after her, his mouth set in a grim line.

. . . . . .

Returned to the stoep, Chrissie found Carol Uys seated there talking to her father. It transpired that they had already arranged a deal by which Carol was to take back the pair of bays (with a mule thrown in) at the same price as he had sold.

The old man said he no longer needed them to take him to *kerk*. He would never enter a *kerk* again he avowed.

Carol and Chrissie shook hands and she went indoors where he presently followed her, for old Retief had fallen once more into absorbed reverie.

"Chrissie," said the young Dutchman, "the war will soon be on now. Old Oom Paul Kruger has defied the *rooi-neks*, and we are to fight."

"Yes, Carol," said she, listlessly arranging the coffee cups.

"I shall be off on commands, at the first call."

"You think there will be fighting in this district too?"

"If there isn't, I shall make for the Transvaal."

The girl fell into a moment's brooding silence.

"War is horrible!" she said slowly.

"Horrible, yes, *maar* afterwards we shall be the baases, and call our country our own."

"I am not sure, Carol; they say these English are good fighters."

"*Mastag!* and what about the Boers? We will show them, you wait a little."

After another silence, he spoke again in a different voice.

"Chrissie——"

Looking up she saw his bashful purpose in his eyes, and strove to avoid the issue.

"Do you see how sick my Poppa is, Carol?"

"Yes, I am sorry, Chrissie, he is very sick. This trouble with the railway has turned his blood, I'm afraid."

"God knows what will happen if he does not shake it off! my poor old Poppa, it will kill him." Tears sprang to her eyes and her hands trembled amidst the crockery. Carol seized one and held it fast.

"Do not fret, Chrissie, I will take care of you, if you will let me. You know I love you and want to marry you. I have already asked Oom Nick and he has given his consent. Will you marry me, Chrissie?"

A bitter little smile twisted her lips. It seemed she had grown suddenly very desirable, since two men, within an hour, should ask her in marriage!

"I do not love you, Carol," she said quietly. His face fell.

"I used to think, Chrissie—but lately you are so changed."

"Yes, I am changed," she answered staring out through the open door, to the tents away by the river. "I *am* changed, Carol. I wish I were not a Boer maisie."

He did not understand this, but it sounded like treason, and he rebuked it.

"But you *are* a Boer maisie, Chrissie. And you must not forget it."

"No, I shall never forget it," she said slowly, "and because of it I will marry you, if you still wish it, Carol. I do not love you, but I will be a good wife to you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, my Chrissie. I too will be a good man to you. You will see."

. . . . . .

The list of killed and injured on the railway workings continued, and by the time the bridge of the Kat River was nearing completion and the line across Jackalsfontein almost laid, it made heavy reading for some wives and mothers, and a Government whose business it was to compensate them. The annoying part of the matter was that there were no shoulders upon which blame for the chapter of accidents could justly be laid. "Acts of Providence" cannot be quarrelled with. Though why "the Hand of God" should have fallen so heavily upon that special part of the line was incomprehensible to the gangers, who were inclined to insinuate that Lucifer (aided by a certain strange and monstrous-looking old man who

sat eternally watching from his stoep) had more to do with the matter.

Nick Retief's arm-chair no longer accommodated him. The large oak and leather settle from the kitchen had been brought out and in its broad seat he sat daily, his great head sunk on his breast, staring with blue eyes grown dim. He was now enormously swollen and of an extraordinary vivid colour. Rage and bitter anger had so poisoned his nature that it seemed, even as Chrissie in her simple way expressed it, as if his blood had "turned" or decomposed in his veins. Yet, despite its grotesqueness, there was something heart-rendingly pathetic in the figure of this old-time Boer who had fought to defeat Progress and been defeated instead.

He had to be helped to bed now, with Chrissie on one side and Shangaan Jim, his oldest Kaffir boy, supporting him on the other. But there came a night when they could not lead him to his bed; his bulk had so much increased during the day that it was in vain to try and pass him through the front door. Chrissie burst into tears.

"Oh! foy toch, my poor Poppey, what are we to do now?"

"Bring out my mattress. I will sleep here where I can see my land," said the old man.

So they brought out his mattress, and he went to bed on the stoep. Shangaan Jim sat by him through the night, and, long after she had retired, Chrissie could hear his mumbling voice relating with many *clicks* and ejaculations tales of when he had worked in the mines at the Diamond Fields.

The next day at Nick Retief's command the big iron and brass bedstead in which his wife had died was set up on the stoep. He slept in it, and again Shangaan Jim stayed by him relating strange stories. The morning after, the old man did not rise from his bed; only called to them to bring many pillows, and prop him up, so that he could see.

"It is nearly finished," he muttered staring across the blue-gum stumps that now were bursting into great clusters of silvery blue leaves, "and I am nearly finished too."

The two thin lines of steel glittering under the moonbeams had, in fact, almost reached the eastern boundary-line of Jackalsfontein. Soon the old man's eyes would be pained no longer by the piles of wood and steel, the tents and paraphernalia of the camp. Shangaan Jim brought the news that all would be removed next day. Chrissie found him whispering by the bedside as the sun went down, and wondered to see a smile on her father's face for the first time in many months—

if that strange distortion of bloated and discoloured flesh could be called a smile?

"Shall I come sit by you to-night for a while, Poppey?" she asked, leaning tenderly over him. "And let Shangaan go to his hut?"

"Yes," he said, "let Shangaan go." He looked up at the big Kaffir, and Chrissie fancied she saw a glance of some significance pass between them, but thought she must be mistaken.

At any rate, Shangaan Jim went away, and she sat talking to her father for a long while, listening preciously to every broken muttered word that fell from him, for she was well aware that the end was near.

He spoke of her marriage with Piet. It was not such a marriage as he had hoped for her. One of those *pat-looping* Uyses! But still, Piet was a good fellow, and the only one of her suitors who had remained faithful, now that the money was all gone! Piet would be a good husband, but she must look after the farm, or he would be robbed and lose it, and have to retire to the back lands and the bad veld like all the Uys clan who were bad managers, though they were good men. He made her promise that she would marry Piet soon, so that when the war broke out she could follow him to the field if need be.

"As your mother would have followed me," he said, and looked up at the pale still face of his child. For, in proportion to his great increase of colour and stature she had grown whiter and thinner. Grief for his condition and some other secret sorrow brought tears to wet her pillow many a night, underlined her eyes, and carved faint hollows in her cheeks. Bubbling youth was quite gone out of Chrissie.

As the night wore on, the old man, stirring and turning on his pillows, grew more restless. He panted and gasped and some strange excitement seemed tormenting him, making him roll and struggle like a great helpless beetle. And always he strained to keep his head high on the pillows so that he might stare, and stare across the land. Sometimes he held his breath and seemed to be listening.

It must have been near midnight when a tremendous explosion shook the earth, breaking every pane of glass in the windows behind them, rattling the old farmhouse as though it were made of reeds, and crashing and booming across the empty veld like the crack of doom.

Suddenly, down by the workers' encampment, flames sprang up and cries and groans were heard. Chrissie, recovered from her first shock of terror and amazement, sprang up.

"Father!" she cried, then stood still staring. The old man was sitting up in bed, his eyes alight with a dreadful fire.

"Now, I can die in peace," he shouted. "Jim knew what to do with their dynamite tent! Good boy, Jim! Didn't I warn them that I would blow them off, if they came meddling with my land?"

With a great shout of laughter that rang across the veld like a bell, he fell back upon his pillows. There was a terrible gurgling sound in his throat, and all was still.

One long look at the dead face, then Chrissie ran down the steps and sprang across the veld. Men's forms were moving hither and thither, carrying the dead and wounded away from the raging flames. Groans resounded everywhere, and there were bitter cries for water. To one such cry, in a voice she knew, Chrissie flew like an arrow from a bow.

She found him lying where the explosion had thrown him, far down the river bank, shattered, broken, dying; and when she had given him water, she kissed his lips, and baring her breast let his head lie there, sobbing out his life's blood against her heart.

The Promise of Life

The Promise of Life

"I HAVE been trying to meet you ever since I came to Durban," said the boy, in a voice that all the world might hear, so young it was and eager.

There was a stir among that portion of the world present in Mrs. Carr-Ellison's drawing-room. The man playing beautiful, desultory modulations on the grand piano struck a passionate chord and quivered off into the treble softly so that he might hear the woman's answer; several scandalised skirts shivered and seemed to whisper, but the woman on the high-backed, gold satin sofa, did not disturb herself. She sat unsmiling, her head resting against the back of the sofa, her arms stretched wide on either side of her.

She had the despairing, unlighted eyes that tell of a soul's light gone out, and her mouth drooped bitterly at the corners; but her hair was very beautifully arranged, and her pale gown with

its gloomy sleeves and silvery bands must have taken some weeks to design.

"I saw your picture on Le Poer's table, and I told him to give me an introduction to you; but the beggar wouldn't," the boy went on; and the skirts drawn closer, whispered again. Le Poer was the fastest man in the fastest military set in Maritzburg; what was Miss Wilde's picture doing on his table? Really, these writing women were very queer, one never knew what they were up to, coming from Heaven knows where, and settling down in rooms without a chaperone, writing for newspapers.

"Oh!" the sphinx woman had spoken at last but her voice was very tired and uninterested. She was used to having men try to meet her, and candour did not appeal to her very much. She had long ago worn out her interest in the obvious, and walked through life now with ears only for the silences, and eyes only for the things not seen, unless they were the traces of pain quivering the surface under which she lived. She was always interested in pain.

The boy's persistence worried her; his words seemed very crude. Yet a certain vigour in his voice drew her eyes up to where, waiting for one or other of the men at her side to move, he stood

before her. It occurred to her then that for so tall a man he stood up with remarkable calmness and indifference where everyone was seated.

"The stage," she thought, then mused as to how, if she were writing of him, she could best describe the young untidy way his hair grew above his forehead.

"Ragged would be too extravagant," were the words that formed themselves in her mind with a sense of familiarity that puzzled her, until in a flash she remembered that the night before she had seen him on the stage, and had thought the same thought about his hair.

"Ah! the apothecary!" she exclaimed, and sitting up, stared back into his blue, intense eyes.

"She is really a little mad," thought Mrs. Carr-Ellison, who, at first distressed at the girl's unsociability to a strange guest, was now filled with vague embarrassment to see them staring into each other's eyes and babbling of apothecaries. She did not appreciate that to Dolores Wilde the boy had changed suddenly into a man—a man who had lived and suffered and understood; and that with the memory of how, in the few lines assigned to him as the starving seller of drugs and potions in Shakespeare's greatest romance—he had supplied the touch of tragedy that to her

made the play real life, her inmost soul leaped out to him as a comrade. While, though she knew it not, her hands were already at his heart-strings.

Mrs. Carr-Ellison did not see these things, because they were not to be seen. She only thought that it was very queer and Bohemian of Miss Wilde to behave so, and a very bad example for her daughter Gwen, who was observing the proceedings with all her eyes and ears; so she interrupted that touching of spirit hands with a commonplace.

"Mr. Scarlett," she said, "do take Miss Wilde into the verandah, and get some ices for yourselves."

They refused the ices earnestly, sharing a smile; but they were glad to go. He followed the trails of her strange gown through the wide dim-lit verandahs, and found her a chair in a far corner where the light from above fell palely into her eyes, and restless shadows of maidenhair fern played about her drooping mouth.

"Your picture spoke to me from Le Poer's table," he said, as though there had been no interruption, "and then he told me all about you. Do you mind? Ever since I have wanted to speak to you, and tell you that you shall not always be sad. Look here,"—his expressions

were very boyish,—"I have had my life broken up too, and yet I am beginning to be glad again, and you must. You are too sweet and splendid to be always sad."

"You are very young," she answered quietly, wondering why she did not resent the first spoken sympathy anyone had dared to offer her in all these years. "For me—I am an old woman."

He was twenty-eight, and she was a year younger, but he knew how sorrow ages the heart, and understood. He moved a pot of fern away from her feet, because it seemed to blur the picture of her, sitting there, and a crumple it had made in the hem of her gown he smoothed out with the simplicity of a child and the gentle hands of a woman.

"I am not so young. I have tasted the rough of the world and some of its joys, and I still love the joys. You are in danger of loving its sorrows so much that you will not be able to be happy again when you have the chance."

"I shall never have the chance, boy, not in this world anyhow; the gods will take care of that."

"Well, in the next then," he persisted. "I have all sorts of splendid theories about our failures here being our triumphs there, haven't

you? Don't you—when things go all askew, find yourself building on what comes—after?"

Her lips curved in a wry smile. Truth to tell, this world had treated her so ill that she had but small hope of the next.

He went on speaking with an amazing buoyancy in his voice.

"If death were not so hemmed in with the sickness and horrors that frighten a man! If it would only come to one quickly, out in the open air and sunshine—in a rush of living excitement—how many of us would stay, I wonder?"

"I would," she cried, with a shiver, "I would."

"I wouldn't," he said fervently. "I am so curious and interested in what is hidden that I——"

"Don't," she cried out, half in anger, "you are so young, so full of the joy of life, why do you speak of death? Earth must be very sweet to you yet."

"So it is," he assented, quickly; "and there are always ambitions here."

"Ah, yes!" she said, with the relief of one whose feet have found firm ground. "Our ambitions. What do you want?"

He sat up very straight, and his eyes seemed to grow bluer. He loved his profession.

"I want to be as fine as Ravenhill first. You have seen his *Hamlet*, and know what that means. I want to be his equal and then—alone. Then—but one want at a time is enough, if you mean to achieve it. What do you want?"

She had wanted many things. Her wants had formed the lever by which the gods had worked their irony upon her; and her portion had been dead sea-apples. So now she "went softly under the stars," and voiced no want. But oh! to write something good—not the petty drivel of Women and Emancipation—but something alive and true, so that Meredith, and Kipling, and Hardy would some day take her by the hand and greet her "comrade." Oh! to fill in her life with work, work, work, work, noble work, so that there was never a gap left to remember in. O! for rest from the torment of memory and an empty heart.

Did she tell him these things, or did he simply understand? She never remembered afterwards, but she knew that he knew, on that sweet, tropical summer night.

They sat late talking.

The hostess gave her into his charge, and, like all the other guests, they went away in a ricksha, with the bells tinkling and the Zulu boy's white suit gleaming in the vapoury, delicate light shed

by a slender fragment of moon and a star-splashed sky.

"Doesn't it appal you sometimes to think how much that little fragment of moon knows about you?" she asked. "She has seen all one's sins and all one's sufferings——"

"And knows the reason for both," he said quietly.

She shivered, and her little lonely hands, lying on the ricksha coverlet like white flowers, trembled, so that he took them up and held them.

"Some day she will see you happy, too," he said, "for she is a very tender old moon."

And when Dolores would have laughed her little bitter laugh at the thought of happiness, no sound would come, for the bitterness was all gone, and a great peace had fallen on her heart.

At her door he spoke of a reception which was to be given the next night to a famous singer who was visiting Natal. They were both going to the reception, but he would be late, he said. He was "on" in the last act of *Romeo and Juliet.* Would she keep him a dance if there was any dancing afterwards? She promised.

When the next night came he was very late, but he came straight to her, and the peace within her deepened as she felt his arm about her.

She did not look up at him, for his eyes had grown so deeply, fiercely blue, that she dared not meet them there, before all the world.

While they danced, and all too soon, the music swerved suddenly from the waltz into "God Save the Queen," and their evening was over. He was fain to take her to the cloak-room, where a woman friend waited; but in the shadow of the doorway he spoke.

"I find I want something else, besides fame. Will you give it to me, you sweet, sad woman?"

She could not speak, her heart was in her throat; but the droop had gone from her lips, and her eyes were shining in the dark like velvet stars.

"When may I come to you! To-morrow?"

Her heart urged yes, but her brain remembered that to-morrow she must interview the famous singer. She would give it up, she thought swiftly, and let her newspaper go. But no! Perhaps, if she denied herself for a few short hours, the gods would remember, and make her reward the sweeter. She must make some sacrifice for this great happiness.

"No; Wednesday," she whispered, and quickly, for fear she should revoke:

"Good-night."

. . . . . .

For a day of general rejoicing, as the twenty-fourth of May always is in the Colonies, Tuesday dawned drab and dreary.

Looking from her window in the early morning, Dolores could see the waves rushing and ravening wildly in the bay, and beating themselves in foamy fury against the embankment.

"They will have a dreadful day for their aquatic sports," she thought, recalling a typed headline she had seen in the editor's office the day before, and remembering how, on public holidays, everyone in Durban went on to the bay; but she did not care very much. The wind might blow and the sea might lash from that day forth for evermore, it would not matter to her. Nothing mattered but that the gods had relented. The gods! What gods? There was only one God. Cecil Scarlett's God, and He was very good. He had forgiven her for her pagan heart, and the years of misery had dropped from her. Cecil Scarlett wanted her, and she was the King's daughter among women. Life seemed worth the trouble again, and the joy of eventful living came back with the flush and swell of a tide.

She fell to mapping out her day so that every chink of it should be filled up until she saw him again. Her interview with Madame, the singer,

at eleven; the afternoon to write it up, and to finish some other work for her editor; then the famous lady's concert, which she must attend that night and criticise for her paper. And after? The thought came over her that she could not wait till to-morrow, she must see him before. She would go to the theatre after the concert, slip into her place in the stage-box, and he would see her and come to her afterwards. So it would come sooner after all. She would wear her primrose gown—years ago she had been beautiful in yellow—she would be beautiful again to-night for him (a wild-rose flush flew into her cheeks); no more black and white gowns for her. Ah! surely the day would be too long.

As she dressed, words to fit her mood came to her in the lines of Alice Meynell's *Renouncement*—

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that dwells in all delight—
The thought of thee—and in the blue heavens' height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

Once during the afternoon she left her work on an impulse and went into the balcony for a moment.

A fresh, strong wind, smelling of the sea, was blowing, and the sun had burst radiantly from behind the clouds.

Suddenly she had a strong impression of Cecil Scarlett.

She closed her eyes involuntarily, and the wind rushed across her parted lips. It was almost as if he had kissed her —the kiss she had seen in his eyes the night before.

. . . . . .

"And in the sweetest passage of a song," she whispered, as, her day's work over, she sat facing the platform in the crowded concert hall; and she told herself that she would not give up one of the tormented moments that kept her from him.

While the audience waited for the appearance of the woman whose wonderful voice had never before been heard on African shores, not she, but one of her company—a dark, sombre-eyed woman —came on to the platform with music in her hand.

Dolores trembled. Why was this? Who was this sorrowful woman? Had not she, Dolores, done forever with sorrow?

Then Sarah Berry's tragic contralto at its wildest and saddest rang out and filled the hall with words of Cowen's *Promise of Life.* When she had finished, and the whole house was on its feet calling her back, Dolores sat hushed, stricken in her seat by the conviction which had come to her with the song—the conviction that Sorrow

had not done with her—that she was Tragedy's own.

The old cold gnaw was back at her heart; she felt with a terrible sense of premonition that she was waiting to be struck; and, while she waited, a woman's smooth, superficial voice said behind her:

"Have you heard, Miss Wilde, that one of the Ravenhill Company was drowned in the bay this afternoon? He and some others were going to the rescue of some wrecked people. Quite young, they say. Dreadful, isn't it? The theatre is closed."

Someone cried, "Hush!" Sarah Berry had come back, and was singing again the last verse of her song.

There is no life that hath not held some sorrow,
There is no soul but hath its secret strife.
Still our eyes smile—our hearts pray for to-morrow,
Fair in its promise of more perfect Life.

. . . . . .

Earth is not all. His angels ever hearken
Heaven shall make perfect our imperfect life.

Dolores sat ashen-faced and stony-eyed; but peace was in her heart. She could not grieve "as others which have no hope."

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